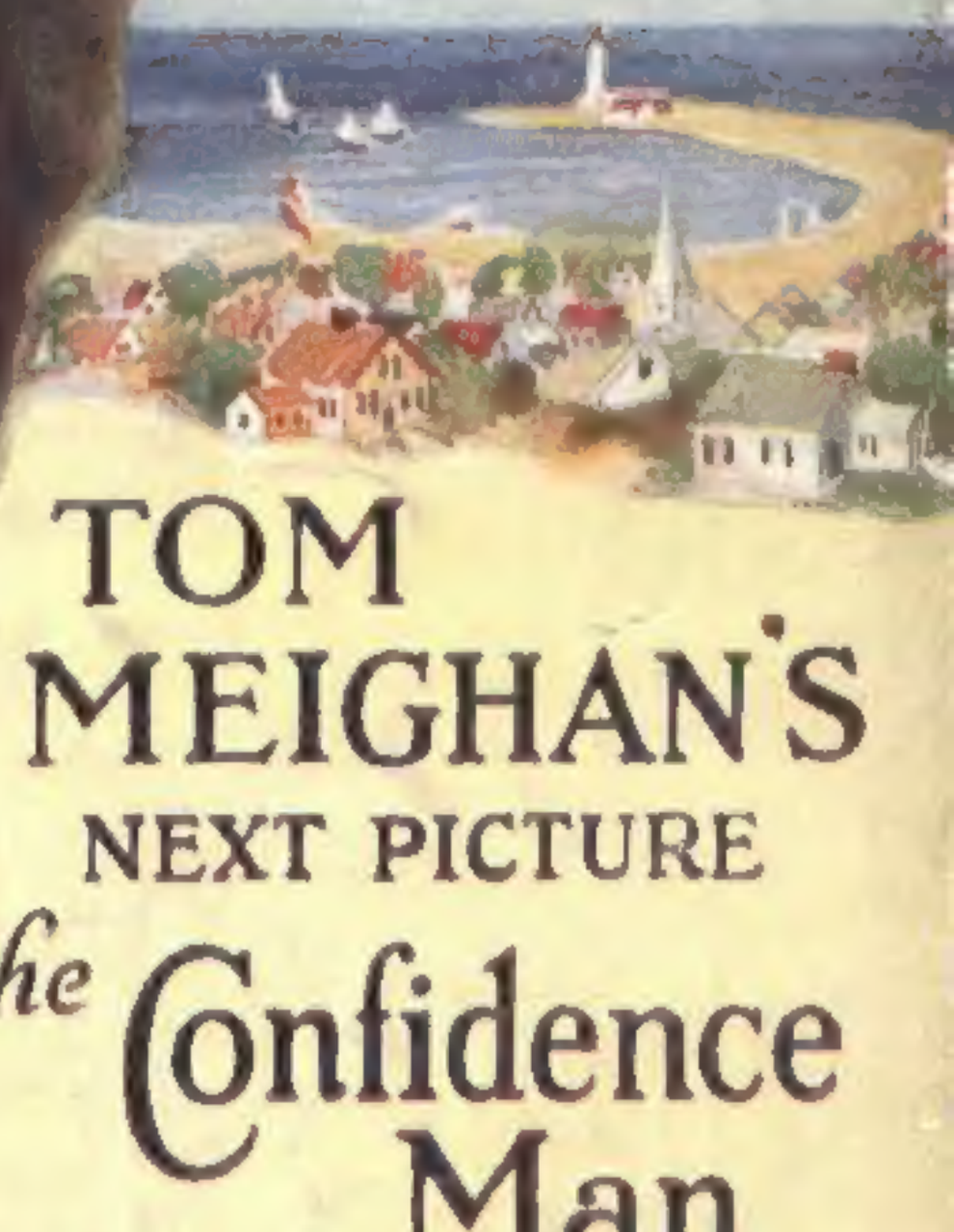
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY





TOM MEIGHAN'S
NEXT PICTURE

The Confidence Man

by Laurie York Erskine

Begins Serially in this Number

10¢ PER COPY — MARCH 15 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLVIII — CONTENTS FOR MARCH 15, 1924 — NUMBER 5

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Misfortune was his by inheritance, but when Opportunity loomed in an impenetrable fog the Jonah swung aboard and fought his way to better fortune. Beginning next week

THE JONAH OF WEST HARBOR

By PHILIP ROBERT DILLON

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President — RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary — CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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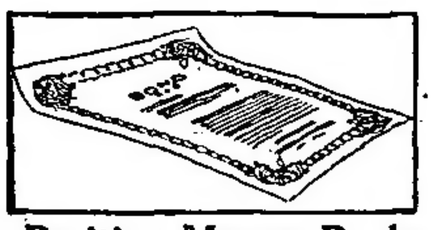
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GO INTO THE CRISPETTE BUSINESS. Everybody likes Crispettes. You can make a lot of money. We start you. Write for facts. LONG EAKINS, 1951 High St., Springfield, Ohio.

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Automobile Owners, garagemen, mechanics, send for free copy America's popular motor magazine. Contains helpful, money-saving articles on repairing, overhauling, ignition, carburetors, batteries, etc. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

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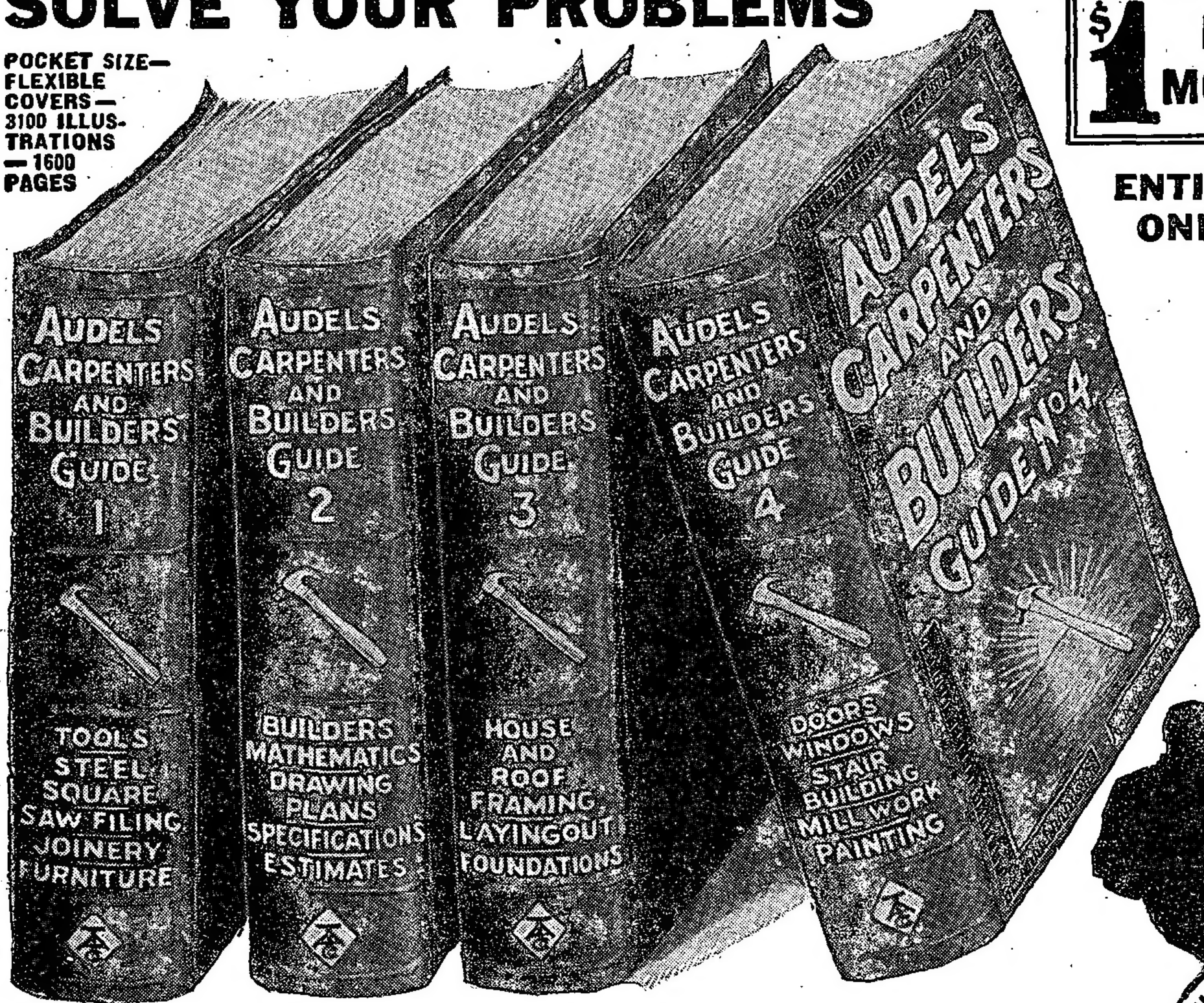
WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403-H Romax Building, New York.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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LET THIS NEW AUDEL SET SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS

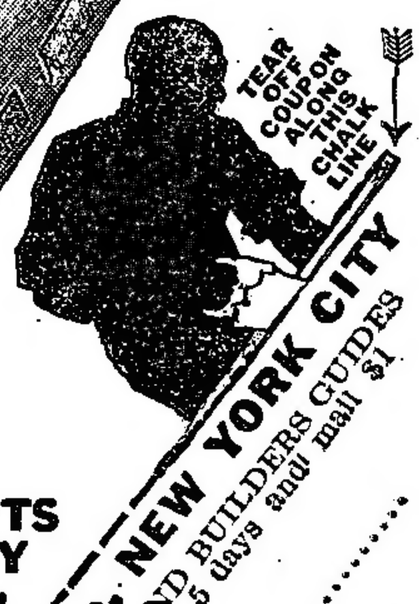
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Send me for *free examination* AUDEL'S CARPENTERS AND BUILDERS GUIDES numbers. If satisfactory I will send you $1 within 5 days and mail $1 monthly until $6 is paid.

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Address.....

Occupation.....

Employed by.....

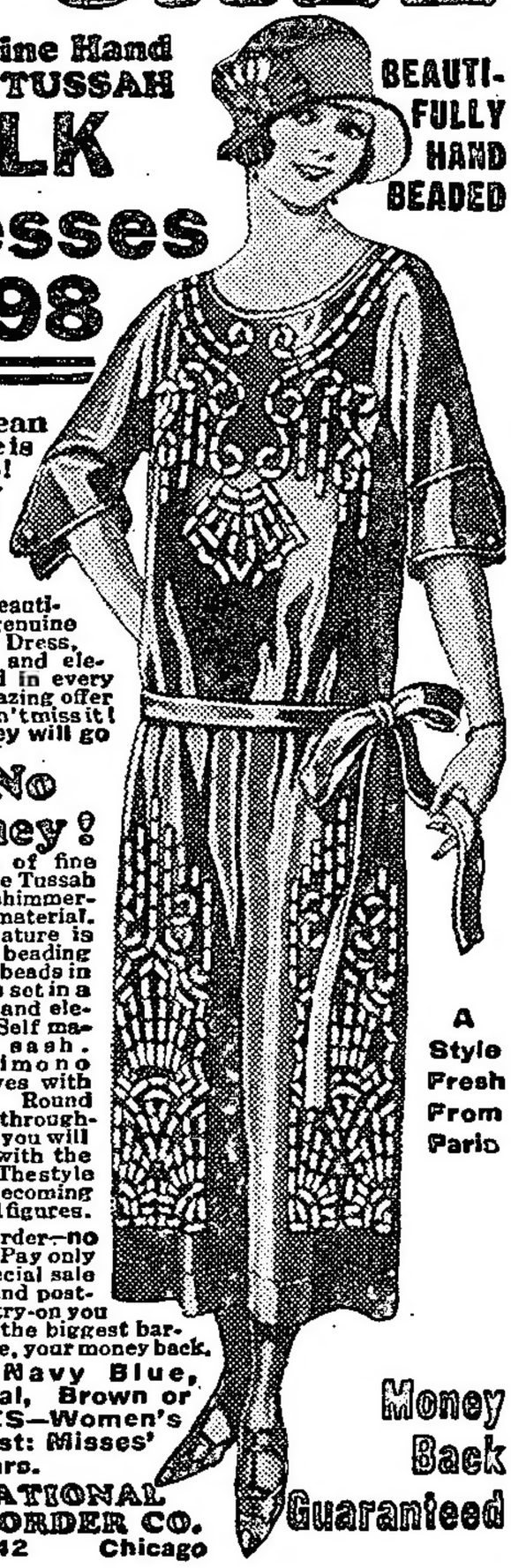
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Argosy, Mar. 15, '24

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A Style Fresh From Paris

Money Back Guaranteed

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COLORS—Navy Blue, Tan, Natural, Brown or Black. **SIZES**—Women's 32 to 46 bust: Misses' 14 to 22 years.

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MANSFIELD CAP MAKERS
Dept. H-3 Cincinnati, Ohio

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR TRAIN PORTERS (colored). $140-$200. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. 836 RAILWAY BUREAU, EAST ST. LOUIS, ILLINOIS.

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EARN MONEY AT HOME during spare time painting lamp shades, pillow tops for us. No canvassing. Easy and interesting work. Experience unnecessary. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

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Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

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INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED on cash or royalty basis. Patented or unpatented. In business 24 years. Complete facilities. References. Write ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 249, St. Louis, Mo.

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EARN $10 TO $15 PER DAY. Learn Sign and Pictorial Painting, Showcard Writing, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining and Marbling. Catalogue Free. Chicago Painting School, 152 West Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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The Very Latest Style— Astrakhan Coatee Model Dress with Pleated Skirt

Biggest Bargain Ever Advertised

$30 Style



Only $3.98 C. O. D.

Sizes 32 to 46 in. bust for women; 14, 16 & 18 for misses.

Everybody is wearing them. **Astrakhan Coatee** dresses have taken New York, Chicago and the entire country by storm and **Mardine** here offers you the most beautiful and most stylish creation of the season. A master designer's prize-winning masterpiece. Excellently made of finest quality **Navy Blue Poiret Twill Weave Serge,** the best wearing and most fashionable material today. Becoming to all ages and figures. Regular Coatee Style with pleated skirt. Novelty buckle and King "Tut" cuffs. Trimmed with Astrakhan all the rage. Be the first to wear this most beautiful dress.

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But rush your order **now!** Give us **Name, Address** and **Size.** We will ship the *dress by parcel post. Pay* the mailman **$3.98** and postage when the package arrives. Then examine the dress in your own home. **If not satisfied in every way return the dress to us, and, we will refund every cent of your money.**

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Dept. 172 Chicago

$14.95 Suit

Made to Order Now

Postage Paid



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To introduce unbeatable values, classy style, perfect fit of PROGRESS tailoring we offer, for $14.95 tailored to measure any style suit of your choice, delivered postpaid. We Guarantee Satisfaction or Money Back. Other wonderful values up to $39.50.

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$1 DOWN

21 Jewels

Nothing less than 21 Ruby and Sapphire jewels is good enough for the Burlington masterpiece.

Quality and Style

Adjusted to the second—temperature—isochronism—positions. 25 year Gold Strata Case, in 100 exquisite designs. Only $1 down. Balance in small monthly payments. **Send for free book.**

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Beware of Imitations!

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Unless you see the "Bayer Cross" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer Aspirin proved safe by millions and prescribed by physicians over twenty-three years for

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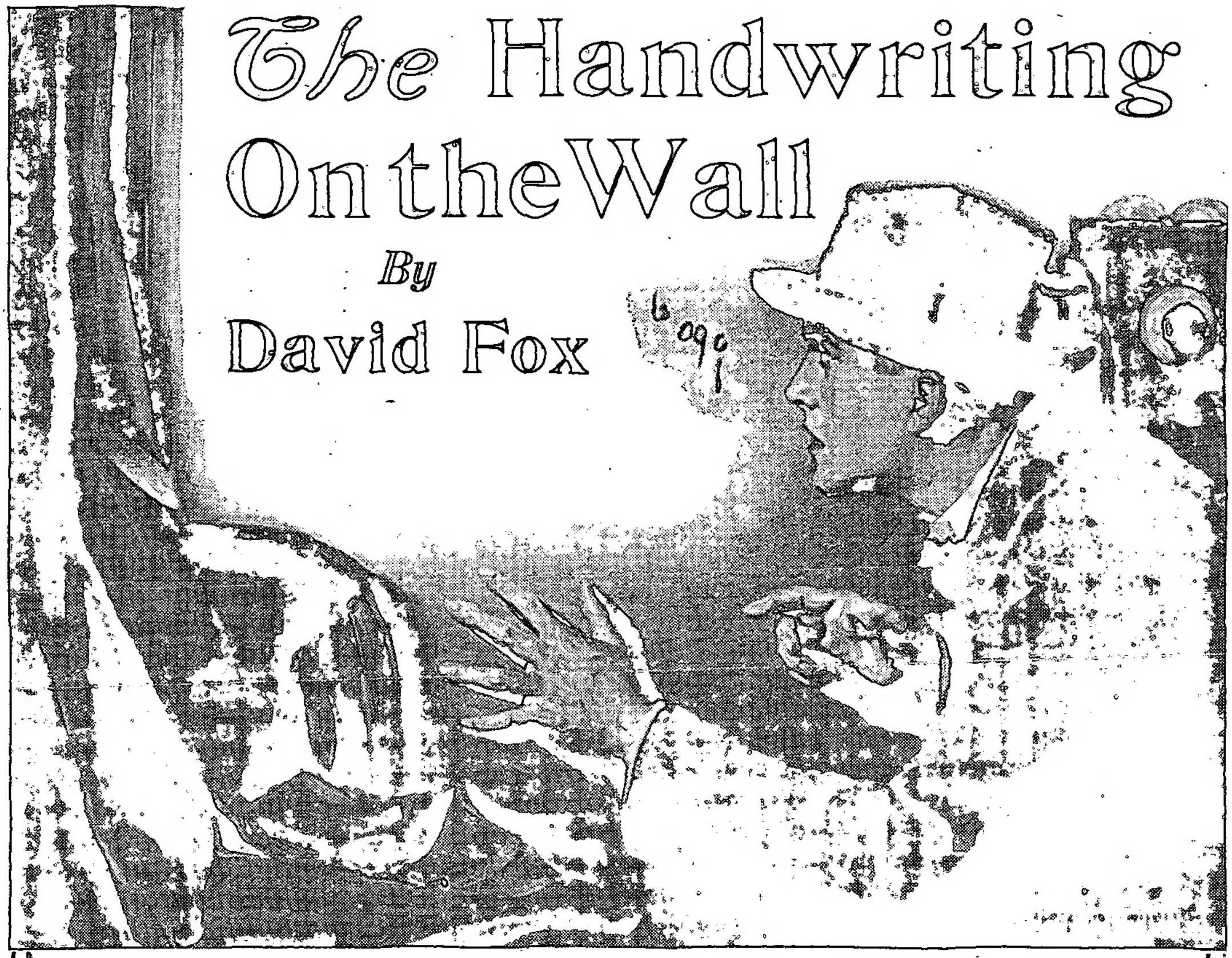
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By

David Fox



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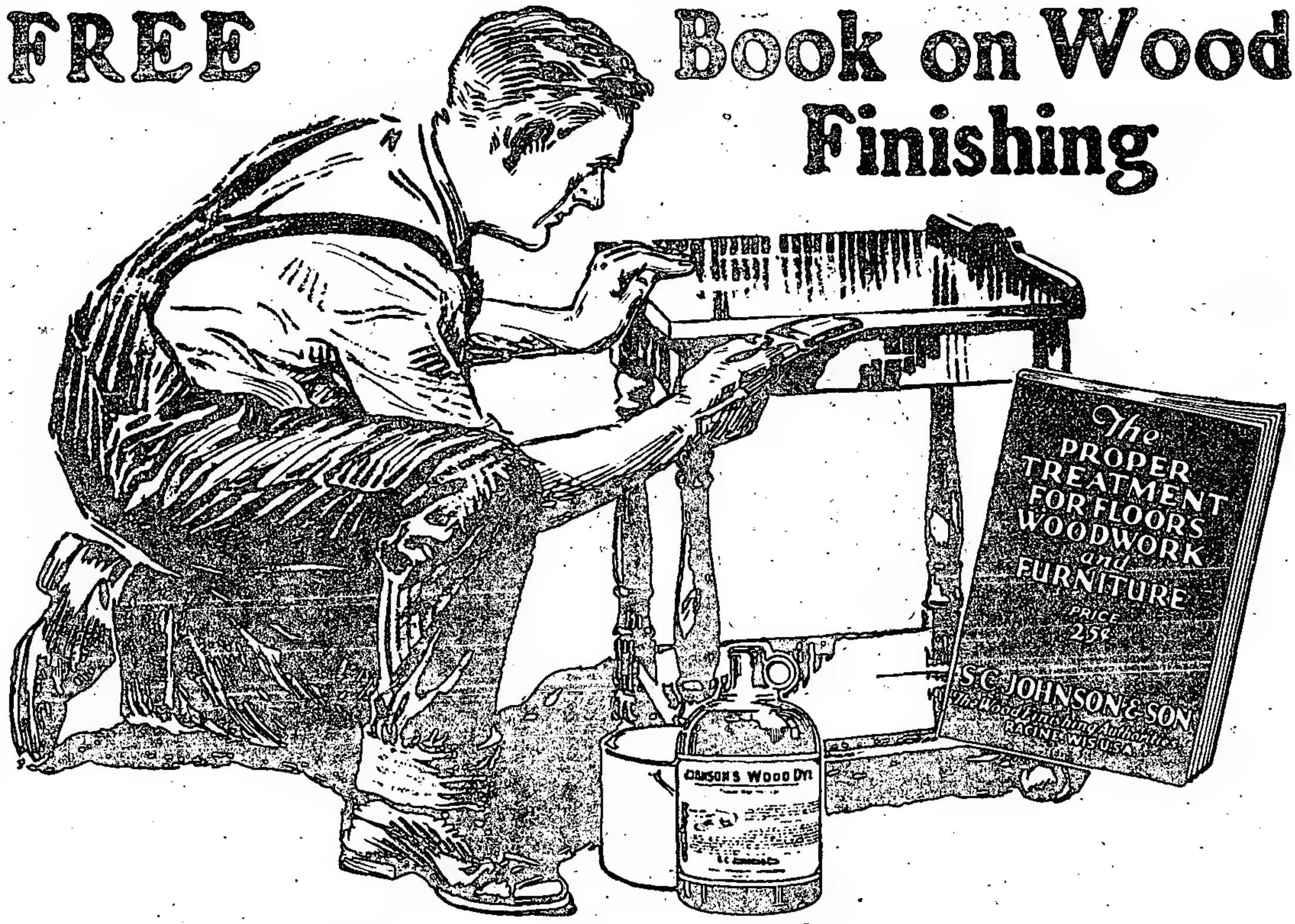
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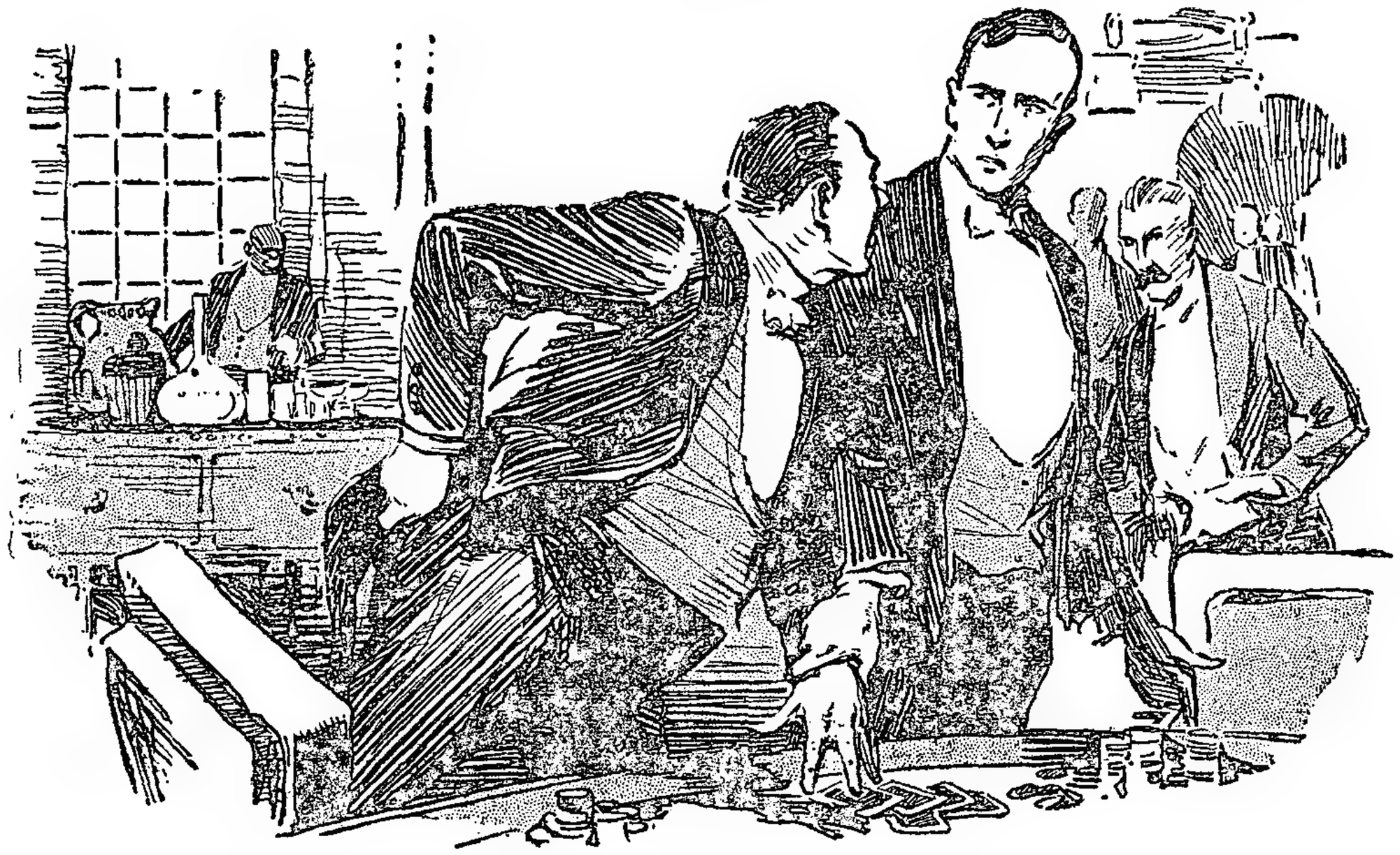
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLVIII SATURDAY, MARCH 15, 1924 NUMBER 5



The Confidence Man

By LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

Author of "The Laughing Rider," "The River Trail," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE GRAND VIZIER PRESUMES.

WITH an elegance, a distinction, that made his passage notable among the bustling masses of the street, the Great Corvan turned from Wall Street into another, narrower cañon, and permitted himself to be swallowed by the gaping maw of the Citizen's Trust Building. With a bow to the starter of elevators, and a cheerful smile for the operator, he bestowed himself slimly in a corner of an express to the nineteenth floor, and was swept upward to alight at the twenty-seventh story. There his tall figure, clad in the softest of well fitting worsteds over the finest of Oriental silks, fitted by its appearance and its bearing the flawless marble of the corridors through which he strode. Fashioned after the haunts of medieval Italian princes, the halls of the Citizen's Trust Building seldom entertained a more appropriate figure than that of the Great Corvan. He was an

aristocrat among New York's fraternity of graft.

Having elegantly but alertly traveled the distance of half a city block along the echoing marble, the Great Corvan selected a door inscribed with the gilded name of the New Process Asphalt and Fuel Company, and entered it. Within, he bestowed a friendly, princely greeting upon the girl at the telephone desk, and coolly passed her to invade the new and glittering offices beyond. He hardly stayed his steps at the desk outside the imposing private office at the rear to fling a question which was a greeting to the boy who guarded the sanctum.

"Mr. Wade?" he smiled.

"Yair," responded the boy. And the Great Corvan passed in.

Wade looked up with a sardonic geniality, natural to himself, from where he sat behind a cluttered desk which was almost mahogany but looked more expensive.

"Hello, Dan!" he exclaimed heartily. "Come in. Everything's fine. Smoke?"

Corvan declined with a gesture, and bestowed distinction upon the glittering newness of the little office by sinking into an overstuffed leather chair and surveying the assembled furniture with a quiet smile. The smile curled his lips into the suggestion of irony. But when his roving gaze fell upon the cold, hard bitten face of Wade, his partner, the smile became inscrutable.

"Remember what I said last Saturday?" he asked. "Here's another one; look it over."

He took from his pocket a newspaper clipping and handed it to the other.

As Wade, swinging back in his chair, examined the article, Corvan's gaze darted with unaccustomed nervousness about the cluttered desk. It pounced upon a copy of the morning paper, and with a quick glance at the preoccupied Wade he picked it up to examine it with an inward excitement which the cool serenity of his expression did not betray.

Wade tossed the scrap of paper on the table.

"That's nothing new!" he said in his machine gun voice. "I knew they got Kennedy, and I knew they sent him up. Five years he got, just because the poor fool didn't know when a good thing was milked dry."

Corvan reappeared from behind the opened newspaper, but his eyes did not leave the sheet.

"Read that," he said quietly; and Wade, following Corvan's slim finger, read:

CONFIDENCE MAN GETS PRISON TERM

Post Office Inspector is Nemesis of Jugglers in Worthless Stock

Spillane Goes to Atlanta Pén

After which was described the nefarious manner in which one Spillane had created out of finest bond paper a concern that had manufactured nothing more lucrative than promises; and now the enterprise had come to grief.

"That's George Spillane," said Corvan. There was in his eyes a peculiar glitter. The confidence man was not afraid; his immunity from panic was one of several traits that placed him alone in his sphere. But he had a premonition of evil; and it showed in his eyes. "I tell you, Wade, our graft is all to the merry as long as we draw trumps. But when you turn up a dead one— They're taking George to Atlanta."

"A piker!" Wade, consciously of coarser fiber than his partner, made up for what he lacked in polish with a peculiar grimness of demeanor, a hardness derived from a hard life. "Spillane was a piker. He pulled the same old stuff, and got the same old dose." He leaned forward and pressed the weight of his granite personality upon the other.

"Pikers—that's what they are," he persisted. "Don't let this run of bad luck the little ones are having get under your skin, Corvan. They can't pit their brains against the law, that's why they fall. They pull a boner. They play into the hands of the dicks every time. Little fellers! Boneheads! Pikers!"

"And the Stone outfit was pinched last Thursday down in Missouri." Corvan's voice was cool, but he considered the cas-

ualty list with an appraising thoughtfulness. "It's not nerves, Wade. But if you play any dangerous game long enough, it gets you. They've never got anything on me yet, and that's why. I stop at the right time.

"I can't get rid of the feeling that there's something going to happen. I told you last week that I was going to let you wind up this asphalt graft alone, and I meant it. I've got to get away; give up the game—for a while, anyway."

"Forget it!" snapped Wade. "You got the wrong dope on this calamity stuff. You're Corvan, you are—the Great Corvan. Kennedy and Spillane ain't in your class. You got the brains, the front, the nerve, and the talk. You ain't any common con man.

"You've read books; you got a mind. Barnum was a piker compared with you. You can steal railroads, if you want to; and play with the United States Treasury just like I'm playin' with this asphalt graft. And you could get away with it, too.

"Hell, the suckers come around and shake hands with you for the favor of having you take the gilt off them." He paused for an instant, having no more words. "And you talk of quitting the game!"

The Great Corvan locked his hands behind his well groomed head.

"You say a lot," he pointed out to his companion. "But you don't seem to head in anywhere."

"Head in?" cried the flustered Mr. Wade. "Head in? Can't you get me? Don't you see what I mean?"

"To make a long story short, I don't."

"I mean this. There isn't any other man has ever been in the game that got away with the graft you have for the last ten years without ever having a private interview with a post office inspector. You're slick, you're clean as a whistle. See? There ain't a dick in the United States got anything on you. You can't quit any more than a bear can go naked. It's your birthright."

"That sounds fine, but the fact is my birthright is beginning to pall. I've gone stale, I guess. But what's the answer? I suppose you would like me to stay in New York all summer and cook up a scheme to sell the Capitol to the British ambassador?"

Wade gazed reflectively at the finger nails of one lean hand.

"No," he said. "When you said you was stale, you said a mouthful. You ain't like the rest of us, Dan. You read too many books and think about people too much. That's bad. All people are either suckers, or bigger fish that live off of suckers. You are the biggest shark of them all. There ain't anybody too big for you." He turned away from his polished finger nails and looked squarely into Corvan's eyes.

"Now, what you got to do," he added, "is to get away somewhere and forget it. Forget the boobs of every kind and variety. Forget the old cons, and the young come-ons. See?

"Just live for a couple of months as if you was born in one of old P. T.'s minutes. Just like an ordinary hick. Then you come back, and we'll get together on the big fall graft with some lays that 'll knock their eyes out."

Corvan's expression didn't change. Upon his face was the boredom of a satiated monarch. He smiled tolerantly upon his prime minister.

"Back to the farm?"

"Hell, no. Listen." Wade took a ruler from the desk and emphasized his words with rhythmic taps of the wood upon his palm. "When you moved out of here last week and pulled that one about not being able to stand the old graft any more before you left, you tipped me off right then to what was the matter.

"Back to the tall grass for our Daniel, I says, and I sent out one of the best little cappers that ever played the in-and-in, to look for a place for you to rusticate in. Ever met 'Snake' Maddox?"

"No. I've heard you brag about him, though."

"Sure. He never turned a trick except-in' probably a phony crap game, before he got back from the war; but I met him then, and he's come along something magnificent. He's quiet—looks like he might be a Sunday school boy—and oh, man, but has that youngster got the nerve?" Mr. Wade

paused dramatically at that, and after fixing Corvan with a piercing blue eye answered the question himself.

"He has," he pronounced briefly. "And he's got control. The best little lad for bringing in the come ons I ever developed." The hard voice of the man spoke proudly.

"Well?" smiled Corvan, who was still lenient, still patient.

"Well, I sent this kid out to look for a country home for the Great Corvan. 'A regular country estate is what I want,' I told him, 'where Dan Corvan can go with a high powered car; and you'll be his Man Friday like millionaires have in the books.' Well, he found it."

Corvan appeared to lose his patience at this.

"What the devil are you raving about, Wade?" he cried. "I don't want any country gentleman stuff. I'm not a nervous wreck."

Wade used his hand with the ruler in it, to brush aside the interruption. He seemed to contain an idea of which he was cynically proud.

"Not a nervous wreck," he agreed, "but kind of stale. Well, Snake Maddox has found just the right place. Ever heard of Brookhampton?"

"Sure. A Long Island resort. And if it's there, the deal is off. I can stand the boobery of the big hotel graft, but this country-home-by-the-sea business exhibits humanity in a phase of stupidity too abysmal for a delicate stomach. All golf and cocktails, show and shoddy."

Wade nodded wisely.

"I said you thought about people too much," he remarked. "Well, Brookhampton isn't the place. The place Maddox has got is a little fishing village over on the Sound shore opposite Brookhampton. It's called East Harbor. Its population is all native, fishermen and such; poor as hell.

"But there's one place there that's like the old families that built it used to live in all over New England, I guess. It's all proud and simple, with big lawns and old trees, private drives and like that. We can rent it for the summer, and you can move in there and live like the lord of the manor. See?"

"But I don't want to be lord of a manor. Haven't I got manners enough?"

"You don't get me, Dan. You go down there, see? You've got lots of money, I guess, and when this asphalt graft folds its tents next week, which it will have to do because the post office dicks are getting real inquisitive, your share of the pickings will be, anyway, fifty thousand.

"So you go down there, and you'll have a big car and horses and servants; and Snake Maddox will be your valet and confidential man—see? In that way you'll get all sorts of time to relax and forget this campful of boobs called New York; and you can think out a set of tricks for the fall trade that 'll set a record."

He was obviously trying to carry his partner by the sweep of his enthusiasm, but while Wade spoke the lenient smile of the Great Corvan had faded. In place of it had appeared an expression which charged his eyes with the metallic glitter of an unmistakable disapproval. Yet his voice remained smooth as oil.

"And you say Maddox has already got this place?" he asked.

"Got it? Sure he's got it. Rented it for the summer. And a housekeeper and gardener. All you got to do is ship down an outfit of nifty duds, get the finest car in the market, and motor down to the old family mansion. See?"

"I see that you're hopping off on the wrong foot, Wade, and right into the fire at that. You might have consulted me before going to all this expense."

Wade looked quickly into the eyes of his partner and saw there condemnation. His hard countenance tightened, grew harder. Wade did not like opposition.

"You don't like it?" he asked.

"I don't," snapped Corvan. "You're all wrong, Wade. For the mood I'm in at present, a week among the rubes would drive me mad." He arose and walked nervously to the window. "There they are" —he indicated the scurrying crowds which moved like massed insects on the streets below—"thousands of them—millions. All out for the graft. All scrambling to feed their bellies at the trough.

"I tell you, Wade, I envy the fellows

who got into the war. It's clean adventure I'm hungering for! A chance to meet a man on some other footing than this interminable scramble for pennies. I'd rather fight it out with axes."

Wade resorted to a rasping persuasiveness.

"Aw, forget it, Dan—that's only a passing mood. Listen, I've gone to a lot of trouble to get this place. and spent money besides."

"More fool you!"

"But it's the best plant in the world for us. Listen. When we open up the big graft in the fall, you can see how nice it will be when I can refer to 'my rich friend, a gentleman of an old Long Island family who lives in seclusion on the old estate.' See?"

He grinned persuasively. But Corvan did not respond.

"In brief, you plan a little game in which I play second fiddle. My only interest in the graft is with the headwork which you seem to think you'll take over yourself. It would be a fine cure for a man who craves excitement to dig himself into a hole in the ground while somebody else plans the layout, wouldn't it?"

He picked up his hat and gloves from the glistening desk.

"Better sublet your little deal in country estates, and think up a better one," he snapped.

With that he turned to the door.

Wade, for all his domineering hardness, could not buck Corvan, and he knew it. So he turned to sentiment; and he did it with inconceivable grace. His appeal gained by the very hardness of his character. He spoke sincerely.

"Dan," he said, "you and me won't quarrel over this. I did it for the best, and I know you'll see that when you think it over. Do that little thing; and remember the old homestead is waiting for you whenever you want it."

Corvan grinned with his hand on the doorknob.

"Sure!" He spoke with a suspicion of acid in his voice. "Sure, you did it for the best, and when it comes to a good graft I'm right with you. But in my present mood the tall grasses are not for me. Better sublet your plant, and get a pair of goggles. I'm going to raise dust."

"Where'll you be to-night?"

"Out at Welsh's. Why?"

"Just so's I can get you if I need to."

"Forget it. I'll be in in the morning.'

And again the elegant Corvan trod the marble corridors of the Citizen's Trust until the ornate portals of that building disgorged him among hurrying crowds that filled him with disgust and deep contempt.

CHAPTER II.

A GENTLEMAN'S GAME.

THE establishment of Mr. Harmon Welsh occupied a highly decorative stucco house in a northern suburb of the city. It was off one of those roads that skirt the Sound and are occupied by residences that rub shoulders with roadhouses of gay repute.

Mr. Welsh's residence had not long been established in these grounds, which fell away in smooth lawns to the Sound, and the gentlemen who came to spend the evening in his lavishly furnished rooms didn't know him much better than they knew each other. But an evening at Harmon Welsh's rapidly became synonymous with the promise of convivial and sportsmanlike recreation; and the small matter that they who came seldom went away without leaving currency, checks or negotiable instruments behind them, was for the most part written off the accounts of those visitors as losses which contributed in some vague way to the dignity and honor of a good sport.

Under this amiable arrangement it occurred to nobody that Mr. Harmon Welsh might be called a professional gambler, and as a matter of fact few of his guests knew that he was. Corvan was one of the few.

Corvan had known Welsh ever since a day when the elegant and witty confidence man had used the gambler as a convenient tool. That association had profited Welsh to the extent of setting him up in his calling, and he had not forgotten it. In Welsh's house Corvan might be sure of fair play. And while the play was fair,

Corvan delighted in the exhilaration of a game for high stakes.

This evening the stakes promised to rise unusually high, for at Corvan's left sat Charlie Broderick, scion of millions, and a sportsman among sports. Welsh's card room was no place for a piker this evening, and as the assembled players sat waiting for their host to deal, the array of wealth in the center of the table proved it.

In the black and white formality of dinner clothes, Corvan appeared among these sporting men as more than ever the prince. He sat straight in his chair, and, as Welsh dealt the cards, lazily watched the movements of the gambler's fingers. And as Corvan watched the movement of his fingers, Welsh, inspired by the generous impulses of friendship and by the size of the pot, dealt Corvan a carefully chosen but crooked hand.

Corvan did not betray by the movement of a muscle the dismay and surprise which Welsh's action caused him, yet he saw the play of those twinkling fingers as distinctly as if they had moved for him with the analytical slowness of the accelerated cinema camera. He knew that the cards which lay face down on the table before him were a winning hand, and he knew that that winning hand was crooked.

Wade had said that in all Corvan's career he had never fallen foul of the law. This was due not merely to the fact that the Great Corvan in those days of his ascendancy seldom transgressed the law, and never transgressed it to an extent which would not have made it difficult for the most astute lawyer to prove anything against him; but it was due, too, to a peculiar streak in the man's make up which abhorred an unfair play.

In his nefarious activities, which often involved many thousands of dollars, he victimized only those souls whose avarice permitted him to persuade them that they might profit by apparent advantages to be gained over himself or others. Corvan had never played a crooked hand in his life. He was not capable of playing one.

So Corvan glanced at this well dealt hand, found his suspicion to be truth, eyed keenly the faces of the six sportsmen who surrounded him, and made instantly the decision which was to bring tragedy and confusion on its heels.

Meeting Welsh's eye for the fraction of a second, he slapped down his hand and passed it. Immediately a voice snarled into his ear and a plump hand crossed his left elbow to clutch at the cards he had rejected.

Charlie Broderick, too, had detected something peculiar in the manner of Welsh's deal. His suspicion had not been abated by Corvan's almost imperceptible pause before passing up his hand, and it had been confirmed by the understanding look which had flashed between Corvan and the gambler. So he stretched forth his arm to call a show down.

"By God!" he snarled, "that's a crooked hand, Welsh!"

Corvan snatched for the cards, but Charlie had been quicker. He swept them up from the table and gloated loudly, on his feet.

"You don't throw down a hand like that every day!" he cried.

But what that hand was, the other five sportsmen were never to know, for if Charlie was quick, Welsh was quick as well. In the immediate disturbance which followed Charlie's grab, he pounced upon the squealer and, even as Broderick spoke, snatched the cards from his hand and flung them to the floor where they were lost among the rest of the pack which the gambler had cunningly thrown down as he arose.

Broderick, incensed, hurled himself upon Welsh, and Corvan, who had sought to drag Welsh back, received the brunt of the attack. The other five sportsmen, seeing that the moment feared most by all who endeavor to cover sportsmanship with a cloak of respectability was now upon them, threw themselves into the conflict with the intention of preserving peace and reputation.

Corvan very coolly hurled his opponent from him and, finding himself then in the grasp of two bulky sportsmen, struggled to free himself. While he struggled he saw Broderick close with Welsh; and saw the table go over before their conflict.

"Let go! You fools," he cried. "Get them apart!"

For he knew that Welsh and Broderick were fighting with the black hatred which only good sportsmen know.

"Let go!" he roared. But the devotees of chance seemed to have decided that Corvan was the strategic center of this combat, and, reënforced, held on. Corvan exerted himself heroically, and he was in good condition. When he saw Broderick reaching for his hip pocket and Welsh close in to block that fatal move, he made a herculean effort and tore himself free.

As he did so, he saw the door of the room swing open and Welsh's butler enter with a colored waiter in attendance. These men, he knew, were professional bouncers, and Corvan saw imminent humiliation for all concerned. With a glimpse of Broderick striving to reach that hip pocket, and another of the advancing attendants, he leaped for the wall and switched off the lights.

In the darkness he heard the mad scramble for the door. And from out the sound of that scramble he heard the detonation of a pistol shot, deafening in the smallness of the room. Instantly a flash and a bang roared an answer to it.

There was a sound of snuffling and a deep drawn breath. Corvan felt a body groping for the light switch, and in another instant the room was filled with light again.

From his position near the door Corvan saw the entire room as a spectator sees the stage of drama. Welsh stood at the switch, and crouching against the opposite wall were the frightened waiter and Noylan, the butler, with a gun in his hand. Almost in the center of the room amid a pile of cards and chips lay the heavily breathing Broderick with a hand clutching at his middle.

"Get out, Sam!" barked Welsh; and, giving the wounded man a wide berth, the colored waiter left the room as though going to execution. Welsh turned upon Corvan the ferocious gaze of a wild beast at bay.

"That was a sweet play you made!" he snarled. "That was a hell of a play!" He embellished his remarks with the unprintable.

"I always pass a bad hand," said Corvan coldly. He advanced to the wounded man and, kneeling, felt his pulse. "He's breathing," he said.

But Welsh's green eyes devoured him maliciously.

"You quit on me!" he growled. "You let me down."

Corvan arose to his feet and fixed the man with uncompromising gaze.

"Take another line," he snapped. "It was your deal."

Welsh grinned with the mirth of a frenzied hound.

"All right." His voice hardly contained his fury. "I'll take another line." He approached Corvan until his face was inches from the countenance of the confidence man. When he spoke he injected an extraordinary effect of savage sarcasm into his voice. "*Thanks!*" he said. "See?"

"What for?" asked Corvan coolly.

The other's snarling grin so close to Corvan's face had something absurdly fantastic in it.

"For shooting when you did. You saved my life."

Corvan, completely understanding Welsh's meaning, regarded him with unimpassioned eyes.

"That's a lie, Welsh," he said. "You know damned well it's a lie. I had no gun."

But Welsh did not relax his savage grin.

"All right," he said. "You know you didn't shoot him, and I say you did. Anyway six men saw you douse the lights, Corvan, and when they went up again Broderick was like this. How will that sound to a jury?"

"Rotten," admitted Corvan, not dropping his gaze.

"And you needn't think it won't come to that. That's Charlie Broderick layin' there on the floor, and they'll tear the guts out of the earth to get the man who did it. You got me into this, Corvan!" The man's voice vibrated with self pity, panic, and fury. "And I may go to the chair for it. But if I do, we'll go together!"

Corvan calmly summed up the situation.

"Don't lose your nerve, Welsh," he advised, sharply. "Do what I say, and we'll come clean yet."

He turned to the wounded man again.

"Get a doctor," he ordered. "I'll get in touch with Grimshaw, and we'll run Broderick over to his home by water. Don't be afraid about the doctor. You'll have to disappear to-night, anyway, and the doctor won't know who his patient is."

Welsh turned to the butler.

"Hear that?" he barked. "Get a doctor, Noylan, and quick!" The man fairly ran from the room. "Who is Grimshaw?" demanded Welsh suspiciously.

"Runs rum in a rotten motor boat. Be ready to leave in fifteen minutes."

Five minutes later a speeding car wheeled to the edge of a dilapidated wharf and the single passenger leaped out to pound on the door of the shack that stood on the wharf end. The door was opened and the frowzy head of a man as dilapidated as the rotten old wharf peered out.

"It's Corvan!" snapped the motorist. "Get out that old tub of yours, Grimshaw, and get the motor going. I've got a job for you to-night."

The wasted, ruinous face of the wharf rat took upon itself a cunning leer.

"What kind of a job?" he mumbled.

"Got to get a man home. Over to Port Washington. He's sick."

"How sick?"

"That's my business. How much?"

"How is he sick?" persisted the besotted Grimshaw, obstinately.

Corvan thought quickly. The man must inevitably discover that his passenger was wounded. There must be no misunderstanding.

"Shot in a brawl. How much?"

There was something of the animal in the greed and cunning which entered Grimshaw's countenance.

"A thousand dollars," he said.

"Five hundred," snapped Corvan, "and make it fast. We've no time to lose."

"Time costs money," sneered the old ruin. "A thousand dollars."

"Five hundred and fast, or you'll never run another load of booze! Don't you think I'm on to the other traffic you've done with Wade and the rest?" At this, Grimshaw unconsciously imitated many others of his kind in that he cringed before this man. "If I had my way you'd have gone up the river a year ago. Now get that engine going, and you'll make the easiest five hundred you've ever seen."

Grimshaw's bloated face writhed in a contortion of rage and baffled avarice.

"All right, Mr. Corvan, all right," he whined. "Ain't I doin' what you say?"

And Corvan, after seeing Grimshaw actively engaged with the ramshackle craft beside the wharf, turned back to his car with a sense of infinite distaste. He regretted profoundly the indiscretion which had forced him to have traffic with such a character as Grimshaw. In all his dealings he instinctively avoided touching the scum of that underworld upon the upper crust of which he moved.

Aside from an innate disgust, he foresaw darkly that such an association might easily involve him in repeated calls from the depths that could include all the grime of blackmail, extortion and unimaginable claim of comradeship. Yet he reflected it was a fortunate thing that this henchman of the less fastidious Wade should have been so close at hand in the tight fix to which the night had brought him.

Twenty minutes later he was again at the wharf with Welsh, and the bouncing butler, Jim Noylan. Between them they bore the limp form of Charlie Broderick, who looked with glazed eyes upon a fantastic and unfamiliar world, and breathed with a noise that was not pleasant to hear.

Grimshaw awaited them with a lantern, and Noylan joining him on the deck of his boat, Corvan and Welsh lowered the wounded man to their arms. Corvan was visited with a sense of nightmare as he saw the bloated face of the wharf rat gleam green in the lantern light, and caught that light reflected from the glazed eyes of Broderick. It was a foul ending to an unfortunate night, he reflected, and felt disgust well up in his throat like a veritable substance.

"You land at Macy's dock," advised Welsh coldly, "and there'll be a car waiting for you. Just put Broderick in the car, and the man who's driving it will make the

delivery." This last he said with an evil grin. Noylan, who was to accompany Grimshaw, acknowledged these instructions with a nod, and then took the package which Corvan handed to him.

"You give that to Grimshaw when it's landed," Corvan said. And he drove back to the gambling den with Welsh, who sat silent at the wheel in resentful contemplation of the ruin which he felt that Corvan had brought upon him.

In the morning Corvan called Wade on the telephone. He explained the situation hurriedly.

"So I'll have to lay low for a while. I'll use your country refuge after all. You say it was East Harbor, Long Island? All right. I'm motoring down to-day. But just for a month. One month's holiday, Wade. And, by the way, thanks for your foresight. Good-by." He hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER III.

THE COURT FOOL.

IN the cool living room of a spacious old country mansion a young man sat reading a detective story. Snake Maddox liked detective stories; they were so exciting. The inevitable arrest of the villain was invariably thrilling to this promising young crook.

Maddox was a slight young man, dressed modestly in the neat clothing of the upper clerical class. A comfortably situated young accountant, one would guess from his clothing, and, from his well formed face, one would have added the guess that he was probably a member of the Y. M. C. A. It was a grave face.

This particular morning, Snake Maddox appeared to be preoccupied. He read his story nervously, and constantly looked up from the classic mahogany sofa in which he was seated to consult the grandfather's clock beside the expansive fireplace. Snake Maddox was expecting the arrival of the Great Corvan at the Humphrey Place, and he was hoping that Corvan would arrive before luncheon.

Snake Maddox had few aversions, but he despised a squealer, loathed country places, and hated waiting for his meals, He could with reluctance reconcile himself to one of these antipathies, but, as the clock tolled its way through the morning, it appeared as though he were to be called upon this day to endure two. So Snake Maddox was nervous at his reading.

But luck was with him. Even as the clock chimed the approach of a midday meal, which Mrs. Bland always had ready on the minute, the whine of oversized tires on the gravel outside announced the arrival of the long, blue motor car, which bore the Great Corvan to his manorial estate. Snake Maddox slapped his book down upon a gate-legged table, and slid through the broad archway that connected the living room with the lofty hall, just as Mrs. Bland opened the door and admitted Corvan to the house.

Corvan won Mrs. Bland at once with his princely bearing and kindly manner. She gathered that he felt a real pleasure in making her acquaintance. A true gentleman, she decided.

"And this is Maddox?" asked the Great Corvan. It was an introduction.

"Sure, Maddox," murmured the Snake. He felt a certain restraint in the presence of the housekeeper. "You can leave Mr. Corvan to me, ma'am," he informed her, stiffly. And she was anxious enough to return to her kitchen, to act upon his suggestion without questioning the restraint. Both the men were relieved by her exit.

Maddox took Corvan's light overcoat as he doffed it, and placed it, with Corvan's hat, upon the rack.

"So you're Snake Maddox?" smiled the confidence man.

"The same," said Maddox, who was himself again. "Lemme give you a card." He slipped a pasteboard into Corvan's hand.

"Daniel G. Corvan," read the confidence man. "But this is my own card."

"Perhaps you'd like the case?" offered Maddox, and produced Corvan's card case, too.

Corvan appraised the youngster with a narrow gaze.

"Thank you," he said dryly, as he returned the card case to his pocket. "You couldn't provide me with my wallet, by any chance?" He patted his coat pockets. "And my cigarette case?"

"Sure," grinned Maddox. "Any little thing." He produced the desired articles, added a cigarette holder and a silver pencil for good measure, and, with the greatest good humor, followed his chieftain into the living room. Corvan turned before the fireplace, and with his lenient smile fixed a pair of uncompromising gray eyes upon the youth.

"Your style, Maddox, is admirable," he said. "I suppose you can stack the pasteboards and throw a mean pair of dice into the bargain?"

Maddox took a pair of dice out of his waistcoat pocket and sidled up to the gate-legged table.

"A cold seven," he remarked flippantly, and threw the dice, rattling, upon the polished surface. They turned up one and five. "If you got designs on the natives," he pointed out, "come to poppa."

But Corvan's cold eyes had not moved from the young man's countenance; his smile had not relaxed.

"And why are you known as 'Snake'?" he asked.

"Slippery," admitted Maddox. "That's me. Always wriggle out of trouble like a dead oyster off a greasy fork. Watch me work." He had picked up the dice from the table, and with twinkling fingers slipped them into a tiny pigskin case.

"Now you see it, now you don't," he announced gravely, and the little case disappeared from his hand with the illusion of smoke dissipated by a wind.

"You get them from under the carpet," he explained, and, bending over to lift the corner of the rug, he kicked the little leather case from underneath it. All this Corvan watched with unabating smile and uncompromising eyes.

"Slick," he said. "For a man with such talents as yours, this holiday of ours should prove a complete retirement."

Snake Maddox winked.

"Watch me," he predicted. "Just watch me. You could work the old shell game here, and sell gold bricks on the side. For a man like me, there's such easy pickin's among these natives that it 'll be a shame to take 'em."

"Oh?" volunteered Corvan.

"Sure. There's a poolroom in the village where they're just waitin' for me. Just itchin' to see my lay-out. Do I perform for them?" He paused to tilt his head on one side and regard Corvan with an alert and birdlike mischievousness. "I perform," he announced with decision.

Corvan remained unmoved.

"But not for them," he pointed out.

"How's that?" For the first time Snake Maddox seemed conscious that all was not cordiality in Corvan's smile.

"It's for me and Wade that you're playing this little game, Maddox," said Corvan. "As far as wriggling out of trouble goes, I've no doubt you do it admirably, but you're not going to have a chance to show us here. You're not going to wriggle worth a cent. *Because there's not going to be any trouble!*"

Having delivered this sentiment with no other emphasis than an almost indiscernible deepening of his voice, Corvan continued to fix Maddox with his lenient smile. "Do you understand me?" he asked.

It was among the Snake's peculiar talents that he never flew off the handle. He now regarded Corvan seriously, but without malice, and tried to measure the situation with his glance.

"How's that?" he probed.

"I like your style, Maddox," explained Corvan. "But you'll no doubt admit that the best introduction to a man who is wise to the general lay is not through his pockets. When you used me as exhibit A in your little demonstration, you gave me—no doubt unknowingly—the impression that as a roommate you could run a close heat for my affections with tarantulas, blood-suckers, and the original Badger Game Lizzie.

"Your conversation and performances since then, however, have convinced me that that first impression was due to an excess of zeal. But don't let your enthusiasm carry you too far. We don't know each other yet, but I'm all prepared to chum

around with you as if we had been little pals from birth. Don't spoil it."

"Hell," said Maddox blithely. "I didn't go to ruffle you up."

"No. Well, don't go to ruffle up the natives around here, either. That's what I mean by not spoiling it. If you try any of the old bunkum in this village, one of us goes home to New York; and home for me is right here, until the fall styles in hokum are called for."

With these words the Great Corvan leisurely lit a cigarette. The Snake's face fell.

"Watdyermean, chief? Not string these hicks while the stringin' is good? For the love of Mike, you don't expect to let 'em all go by?"

Corvan smiled at him through the cigarette smoke.

"Right by," he said. "Anyway, until I've looked the ground over." He frowned. "You're not fool enough to suppose that we've taken this place and put in a plant for the sake of playing a lot of hicks with a cold deck, are you? It's the big stuff for the winter we're after, and we can't build a reputation on loaded dice. You're going to be a good little boy while you're here."

He paused for the fraction of a second, only to swoop neatly in again, as Maddox opened his mouth to reply. "I wouldn't be surprised you might go in for the Boy Scouts or something," he conjectured.

The Snake's eyes opened wide with the expression of a hurt child.

"Aw, chief!" he exclaimed.

"Or help out on some farm," continued Corvan.

Maddox tilted his head on one side with unbelieving ears.

"But, chief, you ain't got me!" he protested. Then he sprang into sudden action. He leaped across to the archway, and, after carefully shaking out the draperies, drew them discreetly across the opening. From the archway he glided over to a door which led to the rear. This he opened without rattling the latch, and, after inspecting the corridor behind it, as carefully closed. Then he approached Corvan with elaborate quiet, and indicated by a gesture that he was to sit upon the davenport.

Corvan obeyed, watching his companion with narrowed eyes, and Maddox seated himself upon the extreme edge of the davenport beside him. The Snake then spoke, assuming a remarkable grimace whereby it appeared that only that side of his face nearest Corvan was speaking; and he further excluded the other side of his face by curving his hand across the middle of his mouth and shutting it entirely from view. Thus his low voice might be said to have achieved the utmost in confidentialness.

"Chief," he whispered, "I got 'em all lined up. There ain't nothing to it. Nothing! See?" As he spoke, he insinuated himself closer to Corvan's side.

Corvan almost indiscernibly moved away from his informant, and, taking the diamond scarf pin from his necktie, put it in his pocket.

"Nothing to what?" he asked coldly.

Without removing his hand or returning his mouth to normal, Maddox managed to express injured innocence.

"The natives," he continued, deeply earnest. "I got 'em all lined up. The old lady give me the dope, an' I been lookin' things over."

"The old lady?"

"Sure. Mrs. Bland. It's like this—see?—the hicks down here are all dead or crazy, and the ones what ain't are ripe for pickin'."

Corvan found it necessary to move again, and found himself firmly against the mahogany end of the davenport. He made the best of this by buttoning up his coat and placing both his hands in his outside pockets.

"Ripe?" he queried.

"Aw, lay off, chief!" whispered Maddox. "I ain't takin' anything that belongs to you."

Corvan grinned.

"Merely an instinctive precaution," he assured him. "You were saying that the hicks who aren't dead or crazy are ripe."

Maddox returned to his subject.

"Sure." His inflections in the use of this word were various, but he invariably insinuated with it a rare sense of conviction. "Sure," he said. "Old Humphrey is ripe as a canned tomato. He owns about half

of the world down here, and what he don't own he's got mortgaged.

"He owns this house, and we're payin' him more money for this summer's rent than the whole burg has seen since the record lobster catch in the eighties. He's one of them hard boiled, tight wadded skinflints who support chain drug stores by buying up porous plasters to stick the dollar bills in their pockets with."

"And do I understand he's crazy?"

"No."

"Oh, he's the dead one."

"Hell, no. He wouldn't die till after the end of August, not if you tied him to the middle of Fifth Avenue at Forty-Second Street and started the traffic."

"But he'll be tired of life after the end of August? What's the matter—can't he stand the Long Island winters?"

"No, you don't get me. That brings us down to the dead ones. The end of August is when his favorite mortgage comes due. That's his mortgage on the Fiske place, and he's been so many years betting blue chips in the way of heavier mortgages on the Fiske place that it's got to be a sort of local handicap how long Judson—that's Fiske—will last.

"Odds are seven hundred to a tenth of one per cent that little Lionel—that's Humphrey—takes over the old homestead September first. He wouldn't no more die before that than a kid would get sick before Christmas, and if the foreclosure don't come off, he'll bump off with a busted heart."

"And who is the dead one you refer to?"

"The one I had in mind was Fiske, but almost any little playmate of Lionel's is dead as far as our pickin's are concerned. Fiske, he's groggy as a cold storage fish, and just waitin' for the grand K. O. Then there's Henry Sumpty. Ain't that the ultimate thing in names? Henry Sumpty!"

"I seem to have heard it before somewhere."

"Sure you have. We rented this house off him. Henry is Lionel's cousin by Lionel's third wife, which is the present one. The old boy owns Henry along with the rest of the vacant lots around here, and throws him little things like the renting of this dump, whenever Henry is deserving. I guess Henry ain't deserving most of the time, 'cause when his last kid was born the old man didn't come through with enough to pay the grocer, let alone the doctor's bill, so Henry had to sell his lobster pots and open a soft drink parlor and pool room. That's down on the point. That's where I can run a real nice little game."

"That's where you're mistaken," said Corvan pointedly. "If these people get wise to the kind of slicker you are, Maddox, we'll be lucky to get up to the station ahead of the injured populace."

"But ain't I tellin' yer? They're dead. Dead from the ground up. You could paint Henry Sumpty's head yellow and sell it for a gold brick. And as for this Humphrey sport! He's the hard shell kid. The skinflint hick.

"He's so wise he'd buy cigar coupons for ninety cents apiece because they're green, like dollar bills. Why, even the local dames have played him for a sucker three times running in the matrimonial handicap; think what a few minutes' thought and three walnut shells could do!"

Corvan grinned an involuntary tribute to Snake's eloquence.

"You might try and sell him this estate," he suggested.

Maddox brightened.

"Sure!" he exclaimed hopefully. "Any little thing like that." Then, his face falling as he saw Corvan's mockery: "Aw, you know the kind he is, chief; he can't look past a dollar. Why, he even played his own son dirt because he went and married the daughter of a poor sucker who lapped up enough booze to prove that he hadn't carried any life insurance."

"It's no use, Maddox," decided Corvan. "We can't fool with the small fry. They are honest country people, and we'd better leave them alone. God knows, they earn every penny they've got."

He arose and, walking to the archway, threw the curtains back again. "And they haven't got enough to make it worth while," he finished whimsically.

"But this Humphrey stiff is still rolling in it!" protested Maddox. "You could

peel forty thousand off him just like it was his overcoat. And honest! My good gosh! That bird has a good plain bunco steerer up against the ropes and gasping for breath when it comes to playing the suckers.

"Why, he'd take a bum nickel out of a baby's china pig, and he don't care if it's his own baby. Why, it would be a benefact to huminity to lift a few of the yellow-backs off that old geezer."

"Forget it," advised Corvan.

"Why, listen, chief—what d'you think of a guy that 'd play a deal like this? This Humphrey has a son—see? A guy named Albert; he's by the first wife, and the luckiest, because she cashed in first.

"This Albert goes and takes a wad of money that his mother le' : him and marries a girl whose father takes the cash to buy a set of D. T.'s and knocks off as a result. All right.

"What does the old boy do? He trots round to sonny's humble cottage, tells him he's married a gold digger who ain't any better than she might be, and says he ain't any son of his no more.

"Well, the son's got spirit—see? 'You says a mouthful,' he tells the old man. 'I ain't no son of yours, and if you come round this house again I knock you for a row of barbed wire entanglements.' See? And the old boy beats it, and his wife, too, I wouldn't put it past him.

"Anyway, this Albert changes his name to Trench—Albert Trench—and when he gets a kid of his own, he won't even let the old man see it; which don't worry the old man a whole lot, 'cause when the kid gets older it turns out he's bugs. Crazy as a loon.

"That's the kind of burg you're livin' in now; and that's the kind of people this old Humphrey is. Gosh, you could strip him down to his hide, if you used lots of soap, and you'd be doing the country a service."

But Corvan was unmoved.

"I've told you how we stand," he said. "These people down here are not people as far as we're concerned. They are just part of the scenery. You're a bright boy, Snake, but we're not working. Not down here."

Maddox regarded the future with unadulterated dissatisfaction.

"You mean we settle down in this dump like we enjoyed it?" he demanded.

Corvan frowned. "Well, don't we?"

"No, we don't."

"Then, play as if you did." Maddox was to learn the meaning of that deep, cold tone which Corvan now used. "Acting is the essence of successful con. Learn to act."

"Not me! Not Snake Maddox! I got a reputation for slipping out of trouble. Watch me slip on the night train. I blow on the seven twenty-eight."

"Not to-day you don't. You seem to forget that a lot of boys of your age would be glad to have such a nice home as this. Settle down, my boy. Be domesticated."

"Aw, cut yer kidding! You can't keep me in this dump for a summer. All sand and a bunch of hicks. I wouldn't have come, only for the chance it gave me to perform. Oh, boy! The practice a guy could get! I could sell 'em the bay to plant oysters in! And not a dick in sight!" His eyes glistened.

Corvan frowned. He appreciated the worth of Maddox as a henchman, and was sensible of the need for a companion in what would no doubt be long days in this isolated spot. When a man possesses such a deep seated contempt for humanity as Corvan's profession had developed in his fine and not unphilosophical mind, the society of another of his own sphere is almost the only society tolerable.

Corvan had already divined that the youthful Snake would provide him with amusing company; he did not relish the thought of his departing. Besides, there was the Snake's essential usefulness to be considered.

"Son," he said, "stick around. We've got to lay out bigger things than the selling of gold bricks to the brainless. If you've got the brains, that's what we need. You might have some ideas that will earn you a share of the pot."

Maddox smiled, unconvinced.

"That sounds good," he said with sarcasm. "Wade told me that you was the smoothest thing that ever turned a trick.

Gosh, you'll be selling me a hooch mine, next."

"I mean it," said Corvan.

Maddox shook his head.

"Not for me," he said. "I know where I get off, and it's before I come to your station. Give me time, and I'll be right with you. I ain't in that class. No, sir; I blow to-night."

Corvan frowned at him thoughtfully. He would get the lay of this youth yet, and when he did Maddox would stay.

"Dinner is ready," announced Mrs. Bland from the dining room doorway; and the eyes of Snake Maddox shone.

"Oh, boy!" he enunciated, and turned to Corvan with enthusiasm. "You get better meals here than anywhere else in the world!" he cried. "I've never ate like it before in my life. Come on."

Corvan fell in behind him with profound relief. He knew his Maddox now. He knew that he need worry about his youthful henchman's departure no longer. As long as Mrs. Bland was in the house Maddox would stay.

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

AND Maddox did stay. Mrs. Bland's remarkable cooking and the luxury of a home such as poor Maddox had never dreamed of in his life did their subtle work. They combined to persuade the impetuous Snake to "stick around for a day or two," and Corvan's gift of smooth and persuasive talking made his tentative resolution firmer.

Corvan was an artist in the holding forth of promises, and, determined that Snake Maddox should not desert him, he pushed his chair back from the breakfast table the following morning and poured balm upon the desolation of the Snake.

"I've been thinking over what you said yesterday, Snake," he set forth. "And it doesn't sound so bad. You certainly have looked the crowd over down here, and I don't believe the oldest capper in the game ever got as good a line-up on the local situation as you seem to have obtained."

"Shucks," quoth Maddox modestly. "It was easy pickin's. You just roll in and make yourself nice to the ladies. I don't know how it is, but give me half an hour with a skirt, and I don't care whether she's young or old, a peach or a lime, she's got to come across.

"Just get 'em talkin', and they give you a guide book to the whole works. And can I get 'em talkin'? Watch me." He tipped back his head and inverted his coffee cup over it, to drain the liquid sugar at the bottom with peculiar noises. "Good cawfee," he pronounced.

"You've certainly learned about all there is to learn," assented Corvan heartily. "As far as this village is concerned, you've made me feel as if I've lived here always. After thinking it over, that old man Humphrey appears to me like a good lead. He sounds like a natural born sucker—the kind it's a pleasure to bunco."

"Bunco? Huh, you wouldn't have to do anything more than gild a brick to get a rise out of him," said Maddox disdainfully.

Corvan grinned.

"It does sound sort of tempting," he remarked. "You keep your shirt on, Maddox, and I'll run down to the village this morning and look 'em over."

But as the Great Corvan drove his big car toward the village that morning he was conscious of the fact that he had not been quite frank with Maddox. The life of this obscure fishing village, as retailed to him by the eloquent Snake the preceding afternoon, had interested Corvan; but it had not interested him as a prospective sucker list. He was surprised and somewhat disconcerted to discover that those parts of Maddox's recital which had appealed to him the most had been the parts which dealt with the grim fate that hung over the Fiske homestead; the futile, stumbling career of Henry Sumpty; the grim tragedy of misunderstanding in the marriage of Albert Humphrey, now Albert Trench, and the boy who grew up an idiot.

A long experience had brought Corvan to the dark suspicion that every human being was what is known to the profession which he followed as a sucker; and every

time he had his hair cut, or paid a tailor's bill, he knew that he was no exception. But Maddox had presented these people to him as people had not been presented to him before.

He had come to East Harbor prepared to regard the natives as part of the landscape; he now found himself regarding them as human beings. Was this a part of the mood which had turned him from the game?

Dwelling upon this, Corvan let his car roll slowly along the country roads, and was subconsciously aware of the sweet scent of new cut grass, and of the wild grapes that grew along the fences. Between the road and the bay only a broad stretch of uncultivated and flowered meadows lay.

The sky was a profound blue; a rich, bright atmosphere which could be penetrated but not plumbed. That blue was reflected from the water, and the water was broken by the uneven shore line of the meadows, which, advancing and retreating from the water's edge, finally stretched boldly forth into those long sandy points, tree covered, which form East Harbor.

In the clear atmosphere, Corvan could distinguish the nets of the fishermen as they lay stretched to dry outside the shacks along the points; and the clear outline of the fishing boats in the harbor appeared to him as though they were suspended in the air above the meadows. He felt a desire to walk across those meadows; he felt a subdued wish to stand upon that point. And then he pulled himself together.

He was Corvan, the Great Corvan, of Broadway and the Roaring Forties. He was of the city, and he was wise. These sandy wastes were fields of inertia and decay. Even vegetables could not thrive in them.

"Wonder how much it's worth an acre?" his wiser self prompted him to question. "Might buy up some of it, and start a water front land boom. Nobody 'd ever build there, so it wouldn't spoil the view."

He smiled crookedly, feeling more like himself again, and then he drew his car up under a huge beech tree which stretched its boughs well nigh across the road. He had come in sight of the general store, post office, and ice cream parlor—Wednesdays and Saturdays—which was the heart of the village of East Harbor.

He decided to approach the store on foot. His car would be too conspicuous for the purposes of such casual conversation as he desired. So he stopped his engine, and springing out, walked forward, his slim, distinguished figure more conspicuous in its outing suit of fine homespun than his big car could have been.

Outside the general store a number of the village youth were gathered. They were gathered for the most part along the fence which ran obliquely from the store front to the road; and they disturbed the serenity of Corvan's mood with jeers, hoots, and lamentations.

The lamentations came from Jimmie Sumpty, Henry's second, who had gone too far in the matter of baiting Harold Trench, the idiot. The hoots and jeers were provided by the general ensemble, who egged Jimmie on.

At the moment when Corvan approached this group, Harold Trench sat upon the fence and mouthed angry protests at Jimmie, whose arm he held in the powerful grip of an enraged lunatic. Trench was an oversized boy of seventeen, and he was not a pretty sight.

One of his obsessions had to do with the uselessness of shoes, and since, as soon as he got away from his overworked mother, he invariably threw these appendages from him, his feet were now exposed through the ragged and dusty fabric of his stockings. His cotton shirt front was stained with the droppings of food and drink, and his patched and torn trousers hung like a divided bag from his twisted belt.

His face was not naturally bad looking, but the deadly lack of luster in his eyes, and the loose hang of his lower jaw gave it the repulsive aspect of insanity. The sirupy stains of cheap candy bedecked his mouth and mingled with the dust and grime of his countenance.

This sickening figure, having been teased beyond control, now sat perched unsteadily on the fence, and, holding his smaller tormentor with unreasonable strength, stuttered and mouthed an earnest admonition into the youngster's ear. The others, who

were for the most part older boys, laughed at these antics and the idiot's words. They urged the almost weeping Jimmie to fight.

"Push him off the fence, Jim!" cried one.

"That's right, Harold. You spank him!" yelled another.

As Corvan drew nearer, he would have turned his eyes away from the repulsive spectacle, for he was a fastidious man, but in that instant an urchin, inspired by the encouragement of his elders, rushed forward and gave Harold Trench a violent shove.

Trench, releasing Jimmie's arm, arose with his feet on a lower rail of the fence, and tottered with wild gestures for his balance. With an inarticulate cry, he tottered there, then his face fell into a horrible twitching, and with a fit upon him, he plunged forward, to fall with a thud upon the sand. At that, several of the younger boys scattered in confusion and horror; the others, equally horror-stricken, closed in.

Corvan, who had seen the fall of the idiot boy, and caught a glimpse of the twitching form, and sick, green face, before the boys closed about it, instinctively veered away. He was too well controlled, and too fastidious, to be thrilled at the sight of an accident, and having lived his life in a city where such occurrences were taken care of with almost automatic promptitude, he felt no obligation to assist.

With involuntary, unconscious distaste, he now veered away, just as Margaret Fiske appeared magically in the store doorway, and rushed toward the little knot about the fallen boy. She had seen Trench's fall through the store window, but she appeared to Corvan with the startling suddenness of a vision; a vision of lithe, fresh youth in pink and white calico, and she bore down upon the frightened boys like an avenging and ministering spirit, Corvan halted in his tracks and watched.

"You fiends!" cried the girl. "You've hurt him!" And, scattering the shame-faced youths, she fell to her knees upon the sand and drew the idiot's twisting head toward her.

Corvan winced with distaste as he saw that horrible head drawn upon the crisp calico of her lap, and then winced again as he saw the girl draw forth a snowy handkerchief and wipe away the froth from about the writhing lips. Her fine, fair head was bent toward the face of the stricken boy.

Corvan frowned. It was too uncannily like Beauty and the Beast come true.

"Oh," she murmured. "We must carry him in." She looked up and studied the faces about her hopelessly.

Then a peculiar thing happened to Corvan. He had never looked upon a thing like this before. Here was charity, stripped of all consciousness. Here was the delicate, the clean and the wholesome, bent to succor the stricken and repulsive and oppressed.

But while he, a strong man and, he saw in that moment, not of the finest; a crook, in short, had veered away from the fallen idiot as a thing too horrible to touch, this girl had rushed to the boy without hesitation, without a question of whether she was too delicate a thing to deal with it.

And even as Corvan felt that wave of emotion, which mingled admiration for her with a disgust and deep reproach for himself, the slight and fragile figure of the girl was striving to lift the heavy idiot to his feet.

CHAPTER V.

"YOU SHAMED ME!"

SWIFTLY upon his thought his action followed. Corvan sprang to the girl's side without a word, and took the burden from her. The boy's limbs were twitching spasmodically, and his mouth worked open and shut, snapping his teeth. A trickle of blood ran from his lips. Seizing the boy vigorously by the shoulders, Corvan drew him up to a sitting posture.

"It's epilepsy!" he pronounced briefly. "Give me that bit of wood!"

She hurriedly obeyed him, her eyes turning from the pallid face of the boy to the countenance of the newcomer which shone now with a vigor and purpose that appeared upon the confidence man's face like a new found life. He snatched the bit of wood from her and deftly insinuated it between the working jaws of the epileptic.

"He can't bite his tongue now!" he explained. She glanced at the boy's face with a horrified doubt, but even as she glanced, Corvan had arisen with the boy in his arms, and had turned to the car that stood waiting up the road. She followed him, hurrying close behind his masterful, striding figure.

The boy was a heavy burden, a greater weight than Corvan had imagined he would be, but the man betrayed no sign of the effort he was making. With steady gait, he strode to the car, and heaved his burden to his shoulder so that he might throw open the door; but the girl was before him.

With an arm on his shoulder, she leaned forward and opened the door. She was amazed at the steel band of muscle which moved under the gray homespun.

"My, but you're strong!" she cried. It was an involuntary expression of admiration, and because he knew it was involuntary, he felt a thrill of pleasure and of pride. He further exhibited the fine condition of his body, when, with the boy's weight in his arms, he leaned forward and deposited his burden in the rear of the car.

"Jump in!" he ordered. "We must drive him home."

The run was a short one, and Margaret Fiske, conscious of the twitching burden in the rear, hardly noticed the speed with which they traversed it; but as he whisked the car in through the narrow gate that broke the fence of Albert Trench's yard, she glanced with wonder at the cool, preoccupied face of the man beside her. It had not seemed possible that the car could have made that entry; that it could have been made without slowing down seemed to the girl miraculous.

But she had no time to dwell upon the matter. The car stopped, Corvan was out, and with the boy in his arms, approached the door. She strode at his side, so that he could feel her lithe, youthful figure at his elbow, and, as she reached across him to open the door, he could feel her hand again upon his shoulder.

It was a slim, brown hand, exquisitely smooth and well formed. He caught a quick glimpse of it as he passed her with his burden. And he remembered it.

In the room an older woman appeared. This was the boy's mother. Mrs. Trench had long since become accustomed to these woeful invasions of strong men who accompanied the limp figure of her son.

But she had not before seen a stranger do that service; nor had her boy been brought home so dreadfully still and deathly pale before. With a gasp of dismay she hurried forward and indicated a couch upon which Corvan laid his burden.

Again Margaret was closely at his side. Again her lithe figure touched his, and he found her head close to his; the scent of her brown hair reached him. As he drew himself erect again, breathing deeply, he let his hand fall upon her arm, and she did not seem to notice it. She looked up into his face, her own bright with admiration.

"It was good of you," she said.

And he smiled into her eyes.

"You don't understand," he murmured with an embarrassment new to him. "You shamed me. You made it necessary for me to do it. I was ashamed when I saw you go to him—when I saw his head upon your lap. That's why I did it." He felt it was important that she should know the truth of this.

He turned to the mother.

"Don't be alarmed, ma'am," he assured her. "He'll be all right."

He gazed carefully at the boy.

"He's coming out of it now," he said. And, taking the bit of wood from the loose mouth, he drew out his handkerchief and wiped the blood stained lips.

"He fell off the fence at the store," he said. "I think he's all right now; but I'll run up to Brookhampton and fetch the doctor."

The mother, calm enough as mothers are on such occasions, looked her gratitude.

"That would be kind of you," she said.

As Corvan climbed into his car again he felt a peculiar gladness. It was a sensation that he had experienced in boyhood, but long since forgotten, because it was the sensation that follows the doing of a good deed. It was happiness. And in a definite way, the girl had a part in that happiness, making it the keener. He started his motor, and the girl came running from the house.

"I can't tell you how much I thank you," she said; and he wondered that she could be so heartily thankful for a service done for an idiot boy who meant nothing whatever to her. Even as he wondered she explained it.

"Summer people—like you—" she said, "don't often help us as you did to-day. You couldn't have been kinder if he'd been your son. I want you to know we are grateful."

"But it was for you—" he blurted out. He found that the gift of smooth talking had miraculously deserted him, and decided he had better shut up. "I must hurry," he explained. "That was a bad fall." And he sent the car plunging forward.

"I'll be here when you come back!" she cried after him.

CHAPTER VI.

QUICKSAND.

UP the road along which he had rolled so leisurely in the morning, Corvan now drove with headlong speed. His foot pressed the accelerator with uncompromising tension, and he grudgingly released it to whirl about every curve with the abandonment of a racer on the saucer track. Words were ringing in his ears, and his thoughts dealt fugitively with them, as he deftly played with the wheel.

"Summer people—like you," she had said. She had excluded him from her world with the definite and unconscious exclusion of the proudest society. And hers was a world worth living in; a world where the tragedies of one were the tragedies of all; where a fallen idiot was an object for succor by the fairest, the most delicate of mortals, as if he were her brother. And from that she shut him out.

"Summer people—like you!"

Yet she was more generous than she knew. The Great Corvan was not even to be included in the innocuous snobbery of summer people. He brought to these quiet roadways a touch of something less desirable than snobbery; something of the reek of a city's underworld.

He remembered Jed Grimshaw in the lantern light as a man remembers that his hands are stained with pitch. His lips curled savagely.

As he sped through the green meadows past the clear, clean coastline, he wished that he might belong to that old manor house in which he lived. He vaguely wished that these might be his people.

And, whisking about the corner from which the driveway led into the grounds of the estate, he nearly ran down Snake Maddox and two youths of the village. On a stone by the roadside Maddox was throwing dice with them.

Corvan brought his car to a whining halt.

"Hello, Maddox!" he snapped. And the Snake arose to approach him with a grin.

"Easy money, chief," he whispered.

"Put 'em up, Maddox!" Corvan said in a low voice. "And don't bring 'em out again until we've looked 'em over!"

"What dyer mean?" Maddox was surprised and hurt.

"What I say. Put 'em up. If there's big money, don't spoil it for the little stuff."

There was no mistaking Corvan's tone, and Maddox slipped the dice into his pocket with resignation and disgust.

"There's an epileptic boy down in the village," continued Corvan. "He's had a bad fall, and needs the doctor. I won't be home for lunch."

Maddox looked up at him quickly. This was a new turn.

"Aw, there's clam fritters," he laughed. "Telephone from the house."

"No, I'm driving in. And I'm only hitting the bumps. Tell Mrs. Bland; it's important."

Maddox was at a loss. Surely the great and leisurely Corvan wasn't going to run around the country just to fetch a doctor for a bughouse kid.

"What's eatin' you, chief?" he asked. "Leave 'em run an ambulance down for the dummy."

Corvan started his engine.

"Keep that line for the city, Snake," he snapped impatiently. "Down here we've got to play square with our neighbors."

"Neighbors!" gasped Maddox.

"Sure. The people who live next door."

"God, chief, I believe you got 'em," cried

Maddox spitefully. "The country's driving you bugs. You stepped off into the sand here, and you can't get out. Like quicksand, that's what it is. An' it's gettin' you."

"Get off the running board, Snake," Corvan commanded, and he started the car. "And send your little playmates home." He was gone in a cloud of dust.

Maddox swore.

"Gettin' a doctor for the village nut!" he gasped unbelievingly. And then, to the ardent sportsmen at the roadside:

"I gotta go up to the house."

He resented the power of Corvan's voice, but he obeyed it.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE.

CORVAN made the eight miles to Brookhampton in something less than eleven minutes, and coming back again, made of the doctor a religious man. It was not that the doctor was lacking in protest; he protested against Corvan's wild speed in the name of everything from the Almighty to a sense of civic virtue; but Corvan was a preoccupied man, and the doctor's protests were in vain.

If you consistently press down upon its accelerator, you will find that a high powered car is an engrossing object. Corvan had eyes and ears for nothing but the road, and fleeting through the subconscious stratum of his thoughts was the desire to swing once more between those white gate posts of the Trench cottage, and see if she was there to greet him.

She was.

"Gracious, but you are back quick!" she exclaimed, standing in the doorway. The doctor gave her a brief greeting and passed into the house, leaving them alone on the little veranda.

"How is he?" asked Corvan.

"Better. I don't think the fall hurt him. He seems to have come out of it just as usual."

He discerned the sorrow and the hopelessness with which she spoke.

"I'm sorry," he murmured.

As he spoke there flashed into his mind the words that Snake had spoken. "It's like quicksand, and it's getting you."

He was gazing at the girl. He felt an almost overwhelming desire to be something more to her than the "summer people—like you."

"Do they consider this case hopeless?" he asked her.

She nodded. Again he was conscious that the gift of smooth talking would not avail him here. He must try to control himself.

"You know," he said, "I told you this morning that I was ashamed. You didn't understand me then, but I should like you to know what I meant.

"I saw that they were driving that boy into a fit before it happened, and I saw him take that fall. But I walked around it." He saw a little shadow cross her brow. "You can't understand that, can you?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"It was just an impulse," she said.

"No, it wasn't. It was just that I am not accustomed to help people, like you are. And then I saw you run out and take his head upon your lap. And, you know, I can't tell you what that meant to me. It made me feel ashamed."

Her face was very grave. She frowned as she examined his eyes.

"But we're accustomed to it. To Harold's fits, I mean," she said. Then she smiled, as though satisfied with her conclusion. "That's all it amounts to. You see, when you live next to a person who has fits all the time, you just naturally run and help them. That's all."

With indescribable amazement Corvan perceived that she was excusing him; seeking a charitable explanation for his selfishness. It stirred a chord which was profoundly buried in his heart; a chord which had not been stirred since childhood.

A great emotion welled up within him, and brought a rush of words to his throat, which he could not utter. Warm, demonstrative words they were. "You angel!" he would have cried. "Oh, God, what a swine I am!"

But he was enough the Great Corvan to know that such words would never do. With an effort he controlled himself; but

he could not control those revealing windows which were his eyes, and he saw reflected in the eyes of the girl an emotion which was akin to his. This moment, he perceived, could only end in a wordless parting, and he could not endure that, so he spoke coolly, and masterfully brought the perilous moment under rein.

"Do you think that the case is a hopeless one?"

Her expression changed, betraying a quick surprise.

"Why do you ask me that?" she said.

"You seem to be deeply interested in the poor boy. And I know that you are too brave a spirit to accept a hopeless verdict without a struggle, even if it is only a mental struggle. Do you really think your friend's case is hopeless?"

She left the doorway in which she had been standing, and walked to the edge of the veranda with a quick, nervous stride. She stood for an instant looking over the quiet meadows and the bay beyond, as though seeking counsel there. Then she turned upon him quickly.

"I'm so glad you've asked me that," she said. "I've thought of it so often. But when I first mentioned it to the people here, Dr. Stevens would not let them listen. He was rude, and they would not listen to me. But I do believe there is a hope."

She gazed with bright eyes at him, and was encouraged by his gravity. "It isn't just a foolish thought!" she assured him. "I've inquired about, and written letters. I'm sure he has a chance!"

"Why are you so sure?"

"In Michigan, in Battleberg—that's the name of the town—there is a great specialist, and he has cured more cases of epilepsy than any other doctor in the world. He has taken them after all the others have given them up. And he has cured them. I'm sure of that. I have the figures."

"Yes. And you think Harold should be sent there?"

"Yes."

"Do you know anything of his condition?"

"Yes. You see, he wasn't like this when he was young. He was a lovely boy, one of the brightest little fellows I've ever seen. Then when he was about seven years old he started having fits; but it didn't seem to affect his mind.

"It was only two or three years ago that he started to act peculiarly. Then he became worse, and had the most awful headaches. Now, of course, he's a regular idiot, and he has fits every few days."

As she spoke, tears filled her eyes. He could see that she suffered in sympathy with the boy, as though he were her own. "Oh, it's terrible," she cried with a catch in her breath, "to see him! He could have been so fine! So useful!"

There was a little pause while he stood gravely watching her.

"Well, I heard of this doctor and wrote to him. Dr. Compton, his name is. I told him the whole history of Harold's case, and he has sent me several letters." She looked at him a trifle defiantly. "He says that he thinks the chances are good for a cure," she said.

"You're sure he's the real thing?"

"I know it. I've looked him up. Oh, I've gone into it thoroughly. It seems half the cases of epilepsy are due to a poisonous matter that is made in a gland that ought to help purify the system. He thinks that Harold's case is like that, because of the headaches."

"Just a minute," interrupted Corvan. "Can you remember what that gland is called?"

"Peyer's," she said. "The Peyer's glands. They're found in the intestines. The part called the cecum. Dr. Compton says epilepsy of this form will sometimes cause a growth in the brain, a thickening of the tissue, or something; and that seems to be Harold's case.

"If we get it in time, he thinks an operation can remedy the brain part of it, and then he can cure him of the other trouble just as he cures the others. That's the only kind he can treat, the epilepsy that comes from the gland trouble." She smiled. "I'm afraid I haven't made it very clear," she said.

"Clear enough for me," he remarked with a brevity that sounded almost business-like. "Guess we'll go in and have a chat with the doctor."

"Don't," she cried. "He won't listen to you."

"He doesn't have to," said Corvan. "That's in the constitution. But he can't prevent me from talking." He turned to the door. "That's in the constitution, too, you know. Right of free speech.

"You go and sit in the car," he advised her. Then he saw that she had expected to enter with him. "Better not come in. It would look like collusion."

She smiled her understanding, and he entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLINDING HOPE.

WHEN Corvan entered the living room of Trench's cottage, the invalid was sitting in a rocking chair. His face was pale, and his head was bandaged; he stared vacantly at his mother who spoke in a low voice with the doctor. Albert Trench scowled hopelessly at the carpet.

"Good morning," said Corvan.

The mother came forward. Because of the assaults of life, she appeared old before her time.

"I guess you're Mr. Corvan," she greeted him, "who took the old Humphrey place. It was real kind of you to help Harold like you did. Albert, this is the gentleman who brought Harold home, and he went for the doctor, too."

Albert Trench came forward and shook hands with Corvan.

"Thank you kindly," he said.

"Don't bother about that," said Corvan cheerily. "It was the young lady."

Then he turned his personality upon the room. An army of the mute, obscure victims of the Great Corvan could have warned those people then that they stood no chance whatever. The best confidence man of his generation was about to put over a deal on them.

"What would you say was the nature of this case, doctor?" he asked heartily. The doctor took upon himself a heavy dignity.

"A form of epilepsy. Inherited, I should say"—he glanced at the mother, considerately—"from some remote source."

Corvan elevated a surprised eyebrow.

"Really? He's been afflicted since birth, eh?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Trench, "no, indeed. Harold was quite all right until—until he was seven years old." She turned tear filled eyes away.

"Well, that seems to do away with any idea of inheritance!" Corvan protested. Dr. Stevens scowled.

"You ask for information," he snapped. "It isn't customary to take every stranger into the details of a case."

"Of course not. But, as it happens, I've had a good deal of experience with epilepsy. I take it that you have, too, doctor."

"Epileptics don't form the major part of our population, Mr. Corvan." Dr. Stevens assumed an acidity which should have curled the stranger up. But it didn't.

"Of course not. But I have been able to study no less than a dozen cases in my time, and I assure you they were very interesting. Happily, some of them were cured."

"Cured!" It was a cry of hope which sprang simultaneously from both mother and father.

"Yes, cured. You know a percentage of such cases can be cured."

"Nonsense!" Dr. Stevens quite forgot himself. "Mr. Corvan, you don't seem to understand the situation here. You raise false hopes in these good people. The cure of a case of epilepsy is so rare as to be almost miraculous."

Corvan smiled just the right sort of smile; not too patronizing; not too irritating.

"Of course, you don't have much opportunity to keep abreast of things down here, Dr. Stevens. But what I tell you is an absolute fact. My very close friend, Dr. Compton of Battleberg, Michigan, is the greatest authority on a certain form of epilepsy in the world; and at least thirty per cent of the cases he treats are cured. Have you ever looked into the possibilities of the Peyer's glands, Dr. Stevens?"

The mother and father of the invalid were now standing still, and tense, engrossed in the momentous debate.

"Peyer's glands!" snapped the man of medicine peevishly. "What have Peyer's glands got to do with it?"

Corvan's expression conveyed a polite "I told you so."

"Everything. You are familiar with the proper function of those glands, I presume?"

"Of course."

Corvan did not betray his relief at having passed a dangerous crisis.

"And you don't know their relation to epilepsy?"

"You talk in riddles," fumed the doctor. "There is no relation."

"Oh! Then my friend Dr. Compton has worked to no purpose for fifteen years, and has been curing his cases merely by blind luck."

"Let me tell you that I've heard of your Dr. Compton," cried the physician, "and he's a mere bone setter."

"Beyond the remark that it's quite as nice to be cured by a bone setter as to be cured by Hippocrates himself, we won't argue that," Corvan retorted, gently. "The fact remains that the glands I have spoken of sometimes secrete a toxin that poisons the system and causes epilepsy. This form of epilepsy Dr. Compton can cure, and, since it is the only form which causes the patient to lose the control of his mind, I conclude that it is that form our young friend here is suffering from."

Observe now with what cunning Corvan had led his hearers on. Having convinced them that this affluent and influential stranger was familiar with their son's complaint, he further inspired them with confidence in the unknown healer by obviously confounding the unfortunate Stevens, who, be it said, knew nothing whatever about the phenomena Corvan had spoken of.

It was now time for the grand hurrah; which is the slang of Corvan's profession for the proper moment to land your sucker. Corvan turned to the parents.

"I think, Mr. Trench," he said, "that your boy is in a critical position. It's quite obvious that our friend, Dr. Stevens, can do nothing more for him here; and it is possible that if you wait any longer, it will be too late for Dr. Compton to take the case. I suggest that you send Harold out to Michigan immediately."

At this, Dr. Stevens arose to defend his own.

"Albert Trench, if you do as this man suggests, I give up the case immediately."

"There isn't any case left," said Corvan. "If you'll let me run you over to the train, Mr. Trench, you can have Harold under Dr. Compton's care within forty-eight hours."

"Mr. Corvan seems to know, doc," said Trench slowly.

"He does know," cried Mrs. Trench unexpectedly. And again Corvan felt that inexpressible sensation of unworthiness. This woman trusted him.

"But, Mary, we can't," whispered Trench. "We couldn't even afford to send him up to New York."

Corvan frowned.

"I hope, Mr. Trench, that you are going to let me defray the expenses of this trip. You mustn't let—" But Trench cut him short.

"We ain't beggars," he said.

"No, but you're not in a position to consider yourselves, either. It's a man's future you're playing with. If Compton can see this thing through, you'll have your son back as fine and sound as you are."

The mother's eyes met the father's. Corvan breathed deeply as he caught that glance which they exchanged.

"It's unwise—" protested the discarded physician; but Corvan pushed him aside.

"A new man!" he cried. "For God's sake, don't let pride and money enter into this! If he is remade, he can repay me a thousand times!"

That glance of the two parents, of hope and of smoldering, daring vision, was turned upon him now, and the last shreds of the Great Corvan fell away to reveal the essential man.

"He can repay me in friendship alone!" he cried. And Dr. Stevens was definitely out of it.

"Pack quickly," urged Corvan. "And you can take Harold out to Michigan tonight."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Young Rebels.

By CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

Author of "Out of the World for a While," "That Keeps a Man from Harm," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

"SHAME ON YOU!"

IT had been a sizzlin' hot day in the middle of July, and I was boiling and tired when I come out on my front porch in the cool of the evening and sat down. I had had my snack of cold lunch and pot of coffee of my own brew, but the food and the drink only seemed to make me hotter. I was hoping nothing would turn up that would claim my attention in my capacity of town marshal. I just wanted to sit with my feet on the porch rail and let the little breeze that had begun to stir wave over me and chill some of the heat out of my fat.

I had taken off my coat and hat and collar and tie when I first come home, and after supper I had shook my vest and my shoes. I was in my carpet slippers now, but even they seemed to burn my feet, so I slipped them off and stuck my feet in their white socks up on the porch rail. I wear a No. 11 shoe, and my feet wasn't none too ornamental sticking up there on the rail for all the village to see if it chanced to pass by, and so I kept an ear cocked for footsteps, so's I could drag down my feet if anybody hove in sight.

I had been out in the sun most of the day on official business, and I guess the heat must have seeped into my brain. First off, I forgot all about my feet. The last I paid any attention to them was when I wiggled my toes to let the breeze work its way through my socks. Then I must have dozed off. Next I knew, somebody was speaking to me. I don't come awake with no start, ever; I come out of sleep ca'm and peaceful, the same way I slip into it.

So now I just turned my head a little and cocked up a sleepy eye to see had I been dreaming or had somebody really come up on the porch. Well, somebody had really come up on the porch, and of course, me bein' shoeless and my feet still being reared aloft, the somebody had to be a woman. Worse yet, the woman had to be Elizabeth Fraser.

When I tell you that Elizabeth was the haughtiest woman in our county, you will believe that I took my feet offen that rail and stuck 'em into my carpet slippers quicker 'n scat. Yes, Elizabeth was haughty; she was what you might call a real *bon vivant*, as I heard one drummer say to another down at the hotel one time. She was a she-aristocrat, and there ain't no worse aristocrat than that. A man can be an aristocrat all right, but he can't be as full-fledged an aristocrat as a woman can. Elizabeth had took her thirty-third degree long ago.

Mebbe it ain't good manners to keep a she-aristocrat standing up on my porch while I tell you a little bit about Elizabeth, but let us shoot. I can apologize to Elizabeth another time if I happen to think of it. If not, so be it.

Elizabeth had one real reason for being an aristocrat: she was the richest woman in town. Her husband had been Bob Fraser, dead for ten years or so now.

I mind the time when Bob had a little shop up at Horner's Crossroads. He done blacksmithing and wagon repairing and such like acts of kindness to travelers in the days before automobiles. When automobiles come in, Bob come right in with them. He was the first man in our town to see that automobiles was going to make one or two men rich before they was replaced by flying machines.

First off, Bob begun to repair autos and sell gasoline. Then he got the agency for a car that sold better 'n any other car. Bob was a good picker. He got his agency in our town going first rate, and then he started another in another town, and pretty soon he had five, each one being under the name of another man, but the profits or most of them accruing unto Bob.

In a few years Bob could get a smile from any bank president, and the smile would be generally accompanied by a loan, the amount being fixed by Bob accordin' to his needs at the time.

At the end of them few years Bob buys two acres of land along the railroad. He buys it for about a quarter of what it's worth, having, it appeared, held an option for a long time. He was a far-seeing man, Bob was. On a part of the two acres he sticks up a nice factory, mostly built of cement. In this factory he begins to build an auto of his own. Since he had been taking autos to pieces and putting them together again for a long time, he knowed a considerable about them. The auto he turned out was as nice a looking car as if it cost two thousand dollars, but it sold for only eight hundred.

No more details ain't necessary about the building of the Fraser fortune. Money just flowed in on Bob like one of these here tidal waves you read about. He built a great big house, of course, and had servants and all such, and sent his son Jimmie, who this story is a good deal about, to an Eastern college, and had him highly educated, and Elizabeth, notwithstanding she had been a farmer's daughter, got so you'd have thought she had no spine or else an ossified one—she was that unbending—and then Bob laid himself down and died, naturally leaving all his pile right where it had been at the time he took to his final bed.

Elizabeth grieved, but didn't unbend. So much for her. And now for Jimmie.

Jimmie was one of the nicest kids ever was. When he had come home from college he went right to work. I think mebbe his decision growed out of a conference he must have had with old Bob, for Bob had remained as plain as an old hat till the day of his death. All the frills of his way of life was due to Elizabeth.

Why, Bob used to sneak up to my house whenever he got a chance, and we would play seven-up and drink coffee and have a good time all around. I never went to his house, because he didn't invite me. I guess he thought my two hundred and some pounds would clutter up his parlor—and mebbe he had a thought about Elizabeth, too. Time was when Elizabeth would give

me a smile and a nod, but that was before the river of money started to flow Bob's way.

I've heard since on good authority that Jimmie's going to work caused a considerable fuss between Bob and Elizabeth, for the job Jimmie selected was as a clerk in the grocery store of old 'Lije Brown. I have heard that Elizabeth didn't want Jimmie to go to work at all. When Bob didn't budge none, she was for having him get a job in a bank or something genteel like that. For once Bob set his foot down, and Elizabeth couldn't lift the foot, try as she would. Bob was reported to have said that Jimmie wasn't none too good to be a clerk, inasmuch as his father had been a horseshoer in his time.

A word about old 'Lije Brown. I think 'Lije was a natural born storekeeper. He had the biggest grocery in town and done about seven times the business any other grocer did. For one thing, he charged higher prices, and mebbe that was a reason why folks went to him to trade. 'Lije was a real moneymaker, and of course old Bob didn't despise no moneymakers. That was all Bob knowed his own self.

Well, when Bob died Elizabeth wanted to drag Jimmie out of 'Lije's store. I don't suppose no mother ever had a more devoted son than Jimmie was to Elizabeth, but Jimmie seemed to have that deep down stubborn streak that Bob had. He would give in to his mother on almost any subject, but down goes his foot on the proposition of leaving the store.

He said he was learning to be a business man, and he wasn't going to stop midway in his career. I got my own idea about that. Jimmie may have been learning to be a business man all right, but his car was stuck in the mud. I can tell when a man has got into a rut. Jimmie went to and from that store and worked in it just like he was a machine.

He was a pleasant, fine looking lad, and he was spry, so he waited on more trade than 'Lije's two other clerks put together; but at the same time Jimmie didn't know how good he was. He didn't know what an asset he was to ol' 'Lije, and you bet your canvas shoes 'Lije didn't tell him. The Fraser name and Jimmie's good looks and pleasantness was getting him by as a clerk, but he didn't have no initiative. He wasn't planning to cash in on his reputation. And of course that showed he wasn't no business man. I have a sneaking notion that Jimmie stayed along in the store half because he was already there when his father died, and half because he thought that was what his father would have wanted him to do.

He didn't have to work in no store nor nowhere else. His father had left him ten thousand dollars all in his own right, and the rest of the fortune to Elizabeth. There was around a million all told in that fortune, and Elizabeth would have shelled it all out to Jimmie if he had asked for it.

Yes, she would have shelled it all out to Jimmie—that is, before Jimmie married Sadie Harrison. Gosh, that marriage would make a story all by itself, but there ain't no room to elaborate on it. This Sadie blows into town and goes to work at the Mercantile store after Royal Selden had married Alice Moore and Alice had naturally quit her job.

The winds of heaven must have been blowing soft and fair and free when this Sadie Harrison was born. Gosh, but she was a dazzler! I've met all kinds of folks in my sixty odd years, but I had never met anybody like her before.

It wasn't that she was just pretty, and she was all of that. It wasn't that she had dark, curly hair, bobbed *à la mode*, as they say of ice cream on pie, and big eyes so blue they made you think of the sky in June, and red, red lips, and a burnin' flamin' color in her cheeks. It wasn't that she had the sauciest manner and the swingingest walk and the most graceful figure, and could wear an old gray sweater and a red Tam o' Shanter like they was the silks and satins of a queen.

No, it wasn't none of them things, and bless your heart I don't know what it was. I guess it was just that she was Sadie Harrison and not nobody else in this world. No, she wasn't nobody else, and she didn't give a dingbat for nobody else, and that went for Elizabeth Fraser, too.

I seen them two meet on Main Street

once, and I seen Elizabeth's chin go up a degree as she swept by, and I seen Sadie wink at a strange man standing in the door of the post office. So dazzled that feller was he nearly fell offen the step.

I move it is the sense of the meeting that Sadie made a hit with the boys, and some of them boys had gray in their hair, if they had any hair. Unanimous? I thought it 'd be. Now, I suppose the notion is that Sadie fell for all of them and let 'em tote her around one after the other. I suppose there is a general feeling that Sadie was out for a good time only. Not so. She did go to dances with one young feller and another and auto riding with them that had autos, and to picture plays and the like, but to offset that there is that scene in the drug store.

Sadie had come in and bought a cake of soap. It was in the spring and kind of chilly, and Sadie had gone home and put on her old sweater and her red tam. The sweater was open at the throat, showin' her gleamin' skin, and the tam was tilted on one side over her curls. She always looked chipper, but to-night she looked particular so. Mebbe it was because the springtime was comin' on with its robins and flowers and such. Ah, men, that little girl was kin somehow to flowers and birds and such like things!

Well, she had got her cake of soap and had paid for it with a piece of silver, a smile, and a bob of her curly head, when all the boys of the town, seemed like, had sudden business at the drug store. Each was there to walk with Sadie if she elected to walk, to take her for a ride if they had cars, to take her to a picture show— Oh, anything that Sadie desired could of been hers. They was all so eager that there was a reg'lar jam in the drug store doorway behind them that had been lucky enough to get inside. Sadie looked over the mob and she laughed. Her laugh just then was like little tinklin' bells.

"Shoo," she says. "Shoo, all of you! Let me and my cake of soap escape this riot."

The boys fell back all a-goggle and Sadie plunged through them and went out on the sidewalk and come bang up against Jimmie Fraser, on his way home from 'Lije's store, on his way home to his ma. I wasn't there at the time, but they do say that Jimmie stopped dead in his tracks and looked down at Sadie. I don't know if them two had ever met before, but if they had it wasn't a real meeting. This was a real meeting.

They say that Jimmie stood and stared for a minute at Sadie close under him, for he was a head taller than her, and then he took off his cap and gave her a bow in this here grand manner, and Sadie let her smile die and a kind of a funny look come into her blue eyes and—well, the result was she and Jimmie went walkin' down the street together and that was the beginning of the end or the beginning of the beginning, whichever you like. I ain't arbitrary in these matters.

Neither of them had any leisure time after that. When they wasn't working at their respective jobs they was with each other. They didn't go places where people was; they seemed to want to be where people wasn't; and so it was some time before Elizabeth learned how the wind was setting. When she did find out, she stirred up a little hurricane herself. I had all this from headquarters—from Elizabeth herself—so I know it's straight.

Elizabeth pleaded with her only son to give up "that girl." "That girl," I imagine was bad enough for Jimmie, but her tone, if I know anything about her, was worse. Jimmie flew clean off the handle.

You see, that boy had some of old Bob's stuff in him, and he was young, whereas Bob had been getting along in years when Elizabeth first begun to pull the haughty stuff. Also, whereas Elizabeth was Bob's dearly beloved wife, she was only Jimmie's mother. And I figure that when mothers with gray hair begin to nib in on their sons' love affairs them mothers are away off on their reckonings. Age don't know nothing about youth, in spite of the fact that age was once youth its own self.

Pleading getting her nowhere, Elizabeth made a big mistake. She commanded Jimmie to give up "that girl." She said things about the girl. She thought she was drawing a picture, but for a fact it was only a cartoon. She wound up by saying that

" that girl " wasn't good enough for Jimmie. Well, this Jimmie was a nice boy, and he was head over heels in love. You can't do nothing with a boy like that.

" Mother," said Jimmie, " I don't want to hurt you; but I am going to marry Miss Harrison. Nothing shall stop me. If you will not receive her in your house, that will be your loss. I will never give her up."

Old stuff, of course, but always new, and still newer to a doting mother. Well, there wasn't no tears from Elizabeth. Hardly! Think Elizabeth would let that girl make her cry? Elizabeth was an aristocrat, and no aristocrat cries because ordinary folks seems to have all the trumps for a minute. I seen a play once with French aristocrats in it. Elizabeth had it on 'em.

" My son," she said, her head in the air, " it's your mother or that girl."

Jimmie took his hat, bowed, and said, " Good-by, mother," and went away from the big house that Bob built. Wherever Bob was about then, mebbe he chuckled.

It's within the possibilities that Elizabeth had a little private cry after the departure of her son. I dunno what an aristocrat is like when she is all by her lonesome. Mebbe she gets human. However, our aristocrat didn't relent. She had one or two women pals that she talked to without looking like she was going to snap their heads off, and it may be that she broke to them the news of her intentions toward Jimmie.

Anyhow, the village soon knowed that Jimmie's name no longer adorned Elizabeth's will. Jimmie was adrift with ten thousand of his own money and the niftiest little bride the world ever gazed upon. Oh, yes, they was married. After Jimmie left his mother seemed like he and Sadie could not get married quick enough.

Events happened fast then. Jimmie bought a new bungalow that a man had built when he decided to live in town after he had sold his farm. He lived there a week or so, and then went back to another farm. He had seen the evening train come in six times, and that was sufficient. It was never no different one time from another time, except that it was generally a little later than usual.

Well, Jimmie and Mrs. Jimmie moved into the new bungalow and bought a grand outfit of furniture from Riggs Brothers, including a fine phonograph, and settled down to married life. Elizabeth met Mrs. Jimmie on the street and wouldn't speak to her, and Mrs. Jimmie twisted her red lips and sailed by. Elizabeth met Jimmie on the street and would not speak to him, and Jimmie had a pained look in his young eyes. And outside of that everything went as merry as a wedding bell.

Well, it was about the time that Elizabeth was struck dumb on them two occasions that Elizabeth first called on me. The weather had warmed up, and I was smoking my pipe on the porch and staying awake because a man can stay awake in springtime better 'n in the heat of summer. Elizabeth come up on the porch, and I handed a chair to her, and she set down.

" Mr. Tom Hill," she said, " would you like to earn a little extra money in the next few months?"

" Oh, I don't know," says I. " The hot spell will be coming along pretty soon, and I am tolerable busy as it is. I'm getting along in years, you know, and my job of town marshal is about all I want to handle."

" But this would be easy work, right in your line," she says. " I suppose you could use a little extra money, Mr. Tom Hill?"

" I ain't got no financial worries," says I. " I ain't rich, nor yet am I poor. I got enough to carry me through my days and bury me when I die. That is about as comfortable a state of affairs for a fat man as I know about."

" I had hoped that you would serve me," says she. " We have known each other for many years, Mr. Tom Hill."

I had a notion to tell her that there had been a considerable of an interruption in our acquaintance, but I held my tongue. I am fat and old and not very good looking, and she was an aristocrat. What was the use of me bothering about her?

" Why," says I, " if you wish me to do you a favor, ma'am, I'd be only too glad to."

She stiffens up in her chair, sticks her left hand out straight and twines the fin-

gers of her right hand around it. She done it as good as one of them French aristocrats could have done it, I'll wager.

"Favor?" says she. "Do I seek favors, Mr. Tom Hill?"

I set still in my chair, looking off into the soft, springtime dark.

"The thing I want you to do is this," she says. "I want you to watch that girl for the next two months or so and report to me just what she does."

I set so still I guess she must have thought I had fell asleep. I had to set still or begin cussing, and of course I wouldn't cuss when a woman was right there on my stoop, even if she had offered me a deadly insult.

"I will pay you fifty—I will pay you a hundred dollars a month," she says.

I turned around then and looked her full in the face.

"Lizzie," says I—we used to call her that when she was a farm girl—"Lizzie," I says, dignified, "do you know to whom it is you are talking?"

"Lizzie?" she snorts; and I expected fire to come out of her nostrils. "Lizzie? Do you know to whom you are speaking, Hill? I thought you were a detective."

"Who? Me?" I says, and I had to laugh. "Lordy, no, I ain't no detective."

"I should think not," she says, and she flounced off.

She come back. Time and again she come back. Always she was asking me to find out something about that girl. She was asking me to snoop around to get something on Sadie. Course I wouldn't do it. I wasn't no snoop. Besides, I liked that little lady. To me she seemed to be a nice, bright, colorful sort of a young wife. And that's what I told Elizabeth. And—

Well, here she is again, and I expect she is going to ask me the same thing. I hope I don't get mad. Getting mad when you are past sixty is bad business.

I tucked my toes deeper into my carpet slippers and got up and bowed and motioned her to have a seat. She didn't sit, not at once leastways. Standing straight up like an avenging angel or—or—well, standing up straight and stiff, she says to me in a voice full of sharp tacks:

"Mr. Tom Hill, that girl has run away from my son. She has deserted him. The ship of their marriage has crashed on the rocks of disaster. I told you so, Mr. Tom Hill! I told you so. Shame upon you, Mr. Tom Hill! Shame, shame upon you!"

"You better set down, Lizzie," says I. "I'm goin' to."

And I declare my voice was such a muffled, husky kind of a thing that I scarcely knowed it was my own.

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE RIFTS.

LET me give you a few preambles or whatever you call 'em, before me and Elizabeth takes up this here matter of Sadie's vamosing. It's truly wonderful how wise a man can be after something happens. He can take two and two and put them together, and, lo and behold, there is a four right under his eyes. Before anything happens he can have two and two, and he don't know that they even make four, or else he is too darned lazy to add 'em up to find out what they do make.

Now as I sat staring into the dark that hung low over my front yard, I seen that I had had a whole basketful of twos to add up, and I had added nary one.

A couple of little things popped into my head. A few weeks before this, I recalled, I had met Sadie on the street. Me and her had got to nodding to each other and to stopping to have a little chat now and then as I got, first and last, to nod to and chat with about everybody that come to live in our village. Always when I met Sadie I felt a kind of a streak of brightness run through me, she was so kind of chipper and gay looking; but on this morning I didn't get that feeling at all.

First glimpse of her I see that she was sort of down in the mouth. She wasn't stepping out free and easy like she always done. As I come close to her I see that her mouth was droopy and there was a cloud in her eyes. Pale and wan she looked, as the poet says. Course I stopped. I'm sufficient buoyant my own self to hand on

some of it if the occasion required, and I had a notion this occasion required.

"Mornin', little lady," says I, not letting on I had noticed nothing. "Nice, bright, pleasant kind of a world we are kicking around in this lovely mornin'."

She give me a long, slow, level look from beneath her pretty lashes. Then she fetched a faint sigh through her red lips.

"Yes, it is a pleasant enough world, Mr. Tom Hill," she says, game as she could be. "Nothing's the matter with the world, I guess."

"I was passing Joe Hackney's place the other day," I says, "and I see a few late strawberries on the vines. They was awful red, red as your lips, Mrs. Fraser."

"You're incorrigible, Mr. Tom Hill," says she, and a little smile trickled across her mouth and flowed away into nothing. "Are you always happy?"

"Oh," I said, "I bid good-by to worry long ago. It don't get you nothing. It only brings wrinkles and makes you thin."

"I guess you don't worry, then," she says.

"Well," I hinted, "first and last, a great many folks in this town has told me their troubles."

She give me a squinty look with a considerable of thought behind it.

"Jimmie is working too hard in the store," she said.

"But just look who he's working for," I says, like a blatted old fool.

"Yes, just look," says Sadie, and she walked away and left me there.

'Twas mebbe a week later when I met her again, and again in the morning. It had rained most of the night, and there was scudding white and black clouds weaving across the sky. As I seen Sadie coming, I said to myself that prob'ly this weather had made her more downhearted than she had been on that other bright, sunshiny morning.

When she neared me, however, I seen that that was an offside guess. Honest to goodness, her eyes was like stars. They seemed to be bigger than usual, and they shined like they had been polished. I thought she was happy, but then, her having drawed close, I noticed that there was a peculiar smile on her lips. It was a little smile, a little, trembling smile as if it felt it didn't have no business showing itself at all. Also I seen that Sadie's cheeks didn't have their usual color. It struck me she was what you might call cynical looking, and that was a bad thing for one so young and pretty, it being a bad thing for anybody of any age or looks.

We stopped simultaneous, and I give her good morning, along with a pretty sharp look, though I didn't let her see the look; and I asked her how things was moving.

"Why," she says, "a year has just moved by for me."

"That's a habit years has," says I, "only when you are young they move slow and sweet, but when you are old, like me, they are most fast and sometimes harsh."

"I mean," says Sadie, "that yesterday was my birthday."

"And how old was you?" says I, trying to be polite and interested.

"Twenty," she says. "Age isn't far away from me, Mr. Tom Hill."

"No," says I; "in about forty years from now you will be looking for your first gray hair. Well, Mrs. Fraser, I'm hopin' you had a nice birthday."

"Splendid," she says, and all of a sudden a great flush of color come up in her smooth cheeks. "Absolutely splendid!"

"Nice presents, I expect."

"One present," she said. "One big present."

I looked at her throat for some kind of an ornament, and findin' none I glanced at her hands. She wore her wedding ring and her engagement ring with the little stone in it, but I had seen them before.

"A seal coat for next winter, mebbe," I says.

"Oh, no," she says. "Nothing like that. Nothing at all like that. Why, that would be a vain and foolish gift, Mr. Tom Hill. Can't you see that a young wife shouldn't get vain and foolish gifts? Why, I'm surprised at you, Mr. Tom Hill."

Well, of course I was a reg'lar fathead about the matter. I should have knowed that her looks indicated resentment, but I got a mind that don't entertain company in crowds: one guest at a time is about all

there is room for. It's a kind of a hole-in-the-wall mind where a thing edges in and edges out before any other thing can enter.

"Well," I says, "I ought to be surprised at myself, I guess. Of course Jimmie got you something for the house, something that will last through your lifetime and always be solid and satisfactory and give you a lot of comfort. A nice big chair, mebbe, one of these here deep leather chairs, I'd guess."

"Oh, Mr. Tom Hill, how silly you are!" she sort of cooed. "It wasn't anything like that. I don't believe you'd ever guess what it was. You see, I've been sending our washing to the laundry, and it was quite an expense. So for my birthday Jimmie bought me an electric washing machine. He said it cost a heap of money, but would pay for itself in the end. I haven't used it yet, but I must hurry right home and do so. Won't I take a lot of pleasure in hearing it whir as it washes out the Fraser duds? Won't I though, Mr. Tom Hill? Well, rather!"

She whirls away from me in that quick, light, graceful way she had and goes on down the street. I was kind of haberdashed, so to speak; and I walked along slow in the other direction. As I passed the store I see Jimmie inside, hustling around like he always done, smiling and chatting with the customers while his hands flew. Good clerk, that boy, I says to myself. None better anywheres.

Well, now, with Elizabeth sitting beside me, waiting for me to come out of my trance and say something to her, them two incidents growed and growed till they was as big as mountains. And when a thing gets to be as big as a mountain 'most any man can see it with his naked eye or with a new suit of clothes on his eye, far as that goes.

I discovered what Sadie had meant when she had said that Jimmie was workin' too hard in the store. She had meant that he was workin' too long hours; and now that I thought of it, I knew that that was a fact.

When I was up that early I often seen him go by my house at half past six in the morning. At noon he would go toward his house on his way to lunch. In twenty minutes he would be headed back to the store. I could picture what he done. He rushed into the house, tossed down his cap, snatched a kiss from Sadie, stowed his vittles away fast and furious, snatched another kiss, mebbe wiping his lips with the back of his hand before he done so, and rushed out of the house. Same way with his supper.

Then he got home about eight o'clock. Oh, Jimmie didn't keep no union hours. Fourteen or so hours a day, and the stipend he got from old 'Lije Brown didn't embarrass him none.

Well, you can see how it was: plenty hours for old 'Lije and the store; few hours for Sadie and home. And Sadie, fun lover that she was, growin' weary about that there. Shunned by her mother-in-law, cut off from the other young chaps by her marriage, liked none too well by the girls that had cast hooks into the matrimonial stream in the hope of pullin' Jimmie ashore —well, nobody would have said she was having a hilarious time out of it all. If folks are ever born to be bright and happy, she was so born, and here she was stuck away in the shadow at the angle of the wall of life. Tough? Well, I sh'd kiss a pig.

And I got that washing machine matter full force now. I could imagine her all of a twitter over her approaching birthday. Prob'ly she had had a vision of a box of long-stemmed flowers lying on a bed of green ferns in a tissue lined box, and something to clasp about her neck as she stood before her mirror. Anything! Any kind of a doodaddle that would be vain and foolish and silly and speak vainly and foolishly and sillily of l-o-v-e, *love!* And instead of that, a couple of big huskies had prob'ly lugged in that washing machine and asked her in voices like them from the tomb where they would set it up.

Now, I ain't knocking washing machines. They are good implements. Must be. I know I get a kink in my back if I have to wash out two three pairs of white socks and a few handkerchiefs if the laundry man happens to be late; but I think when a man has a wife like Sadie a good time to bestow a washing machine on her would be exactly

midway between her birthday and Christmas.

"What 'd you say, Elizabeth?" says I; for of course Elizabeth was still sitting on my porch.

"I said shame upon you, Mr. Tom Hill," she says.

"Shame on me?" says I. "What are you shaming me for?"

"Didn't I tell you to watch this young —young—this young—"

"Lady," says I.

"Lady?" Lizzie busts out. "Hussy—perfect hussy!"

"Don't screech like that," I cautioned her. "Anybody goin' by would think I was chokin' you. I repeat, Lizzie, what are you shaming me for?"

"I wish you wouldn't call me Lizzie," she says.

"We both seem to be namin' names in black and white," says I, pretty stern. "The way you refer to your daughter-in-law is vicious, as I look at it. *What* are you shaming me for?"

"I told you to watch that woman. You wouldn't. Now she has deserted my boy. He will never be able to hold up his head again. He will have to go away and leave me all alone."

"He's been kind of leaving you alone," I says. "Or you have been leaving him alone."

"Would I associate with that—that—Hardly! She came between me and my son. If you had watched her, as I ordered you to do, you would have discovered something that would have enabled him to cast her off. Then the world would have known that he was merely putting her aside as he should have done in the first place, instead of listening to her importunities. She was merely after his money. Any one could see that."

"And now she has cast him and his wealth overboard," says I. "That don't seem logical to me."

"She will sue him, stupid," Lizzie says. "She will try to make him pay her alimony. Don't you see her game?"

"Where has she fled to?" I asked.

"To the beach," Lizzie answered. "She left a note for Jimmie to the effect that the heat had tired her out and she had accepted an invitation to visit with the Adamses at their cottage at the beach. You know how lax the Adamses are. That old man will be away half the night, pulling a seine up and down the shore, and his wife will be asleep. That will leave this woman who was the wife of my son free to do as she pleases."

"Them Adamses is easy going, nice old people," says I. "But I expect they won't make any too good watchdogs. What do you kind of suspicion Sadie will do down there at the beach?"

Lizzie made a kind of a sound in her throat. I give her a sidewise peek and seen that she was sitting up straight in her chair, her hands folded in her lap. Her thin lips was tight shut. They would never tell what kind of a crime it was that their owner was looking for Sadie to commit.

"What I wish to know now," says Lizzie pretty soon, "is whether you are going to help me or not."

I wasn't paying so much attention to her. I was thinking of Sadie. Pretty Sadie had a-wearied of a husband who spent his waking hours in a grocery store and who gave her a washing machine on her birthday. I didn't know but what she was justified.

But I could find a word or two of excuse for Jimmie. Jimmie had been brought up under his mother's wing. Except for the four years he was away at college she had hedged him in. I did hear that while he was at college he distinguished himself as a football player, but I ain't never seen a real football game and I didn't know whether that meant anything or not. Besides, Jimmie had dropped down from being a millionaire's son to a man with a few thousand in the bank, a roof over his head, and a job in 'Lije's grocery store.

That is considerable of a drop, though there is a good sized army of nice lads in this country that would think they was on Easy Street if they started out married life with just the little bit Jimmie had. I reckon Jimmie, however, was worried considerable for fear the wolf would get by them hardwood doors in his bungalow. That would explain his long hours and the washing machine matter, though I ain't so sure

about that last. Now that I had got a clear look at that transaction, it kind of looked boneheaded to me.

Well, after this little trip on the mental merry-go-round, I turned to Lizzie again. I was indulgin' myself a little freer than I might have done in these here little mental whirls if anybody but Lizzie had been settin' there on my front porch. Lizzie was all right enough in her way, but it was her way that I objected to—especially her way where Sadie was concerned. I guess it is needless to say by now that I was for Sadie, and when I am for a person the barriers is all burned away.

"In what manner or fashion can I be of assistance to you, Mrs. Fraser?" says I; and in my dignity I could feel a cool draft blowin' through the heat of the night.

Lizzie must have felt it, too, for she come round in her chair with a jerk and give a shrug like somebody had dropped a piece of ice down her back.

"Well," she says, "I admire your *sang-froid*, Hill. Do you not realize that this is a matter of life and death to me? If my boy is disgraced, I shall die. I shall simply die."

"Most folks die simple," says I, "'less they get run over by a truck. I don't think the end is in sight for you yet, Lizzie. However, how can I serve you?"

"You can go down to the beach and watch that person, and report to me as soon as she does something which will give my boy grounds to bring suit for divorce," she snaps.

It was enough to make a goat laugh. Jimmie wouldn't no more have thought of suing Sadie for divorce than he would have thought of shooting her. But I didn't laugh. I wasn't there to tip nothing off to Lizzie.

I just sat and considered these matters for a space while Lizzie watched me out of the corner of her eye. Of course if I had any job in this matter it was to patch up the differences between Sadie and Jimmie. I wished most heartily that I could do that. I would have liked to get them straightened out so that they would have the joy they was entitled to in nature. They was nice young folks, both of them, and it did seem a pity to me that they should be sundered this way. I hadn't had no experience along this patching up line, and I didn't know how a fat old man would go about it. However, as I knew I would do at the start, I finally come to the conclusion that I would butt in.

"Mrs. Fraser," says I, "I will take this job."

"It's about time," Lizzie snorts. "Of course you will have to be careful. I know this is not in your line of work. It is not like solving murder mysteries, as people say you have sometimes solved them in the past. This is a matter to be handled with the utmost delicacy. I fear you may bungle your task, but there is no one else in the village who could or would accept it."

"Don't knock an honest workman, Lizzie," says I. "I will do the best I can."

"When will you start?" she asked.

"I have already started," says I.

She got up and squared her thin shoulders in that haughty way she had. Me, I'm human, and I didn't like her manner now no better than I had liked it for the last quarter century. I kind of hated to see her get away with this thing so high and lofty. So I gets one of these here inspirations.

"Lizzie," says I, "before you go there is a little matter we better attend to."

"Oh," she says, "of course. I will pay you what your work is worth. What do you you think would be right?"

"The town pays me a salary," says I. "I am not looking for any handouts from ladies. However, you and me will come to a small agreement or else you can hire somebody else for your work."

"What is the agreement?" she asks.

"I'll keep an eye on Sadie," says I. "I'll give you my word whatever she does I will report back to you. If she does something that makes Jimmie sue her for divorce, all well and bad. If she does nothing out of the way, and her and Jimmie is reunited, all well and good and you go up to her and take her by the hand and apologize for having entertained mean thoughts about her."

She give me a long, slow stare with frost around the edges of it. It didn't wither me none, however. I didn't give a continental what she thought, felt, done, or was con-

taminated with. She had already expressed her intention of doing her worst by a fine little lady.

"Hill," she says, "you are trying to hold me up."

"Which is slang—and a fact," says I. "Besides, I don't like your manner of calling me Hill. Everybody calls me Mr. Tom Hill. That gives me a pleasant glow, and at my time of life pleasant glows is precious things. Suppose you just adhere to the general custom from this time forth, Lizzie."

"Do you realize that you are addressing me by one of the most odious feminine names in the language?" she asks indignantly.

"Mrs. Fraser," says I, significant.

She can't come to it all of a sudden, but she does at the end, in a murmur, for she needs me; and when a woman needs a man, she will make believe she is courteous and sincere, though her heart may be as haughty as if the promised destruction was lurkin' just around the corner.

"Mr. Tom Hill, Esquire," she says. Then she gives a hard vicious, female laugh. "As for the other matter," she says, "I agree to that, too. I agree to it, Mr. Tom Hill, because I know that if you faithfully discharge your duties no apology to this—this person will be required."

"I will discharge my duties in my more or less faithful manner," says I.

"Very well," she snaps. "And you are not to stop at expense, you understand."

"Nor stone walls," says I.

She swept off down my path to the street, the gravel making little slipping, crunching noises under her feet.

I resumed my seat, kicking off my carpet slippers, and stuck my hot feet up on the rail.

"Dang all women," says I to myself. I begin to feel sleepy right away. I thought of Sadie down at the beach. I lifted my head from a pile driver of a nod. "Except some," says I.

That made me feel better, and after I had nearly sprained my neck nodding a few times I went in and hit the hay. When I woke up the sun was shining bright into my room.

"Another day," says I, thinking of coffee and bacon. "Howdy, day!"

CHAPTER III.

"MERCY ME, HOW RUDE!"

I WAS feeling chipper when I hopped out of bed, and I was feeling better 'n that when I had had my breakfast. So I locked up the house and went out into the street.

Well, I ain't a detective in the strict sense of the word, but I had got my two-and-twos arranged all nice and neat, and that was enough, I figured. It was not yet quite six o'clock, and I went over to the poolroom and lit a big cigar and sat down on the bench out front.

Jimmie had to pass that way on his morning amble to his work, and I calculated to give him what they call the once over as he went by and maybe engage him in talk. I thought it kind of important to see what the state of his feelings was.

I had got a half inch of ash on my cigar when Jimmie hove into sight. I watched him come up to me.

Now, generally Jimmie has a vigorous swing to his walk and he keeps his head up and his shoulders back. First thing I noticed on this bright and sunny morning was that he was sort of slouching along. His head was down, his shoulders drooped.

"The punch Sadie handed him was pretty nigh a knockout," I says to myself.

Jimmie hove up in front of me. His eyes was on the sidewalk, and he either didn't see me or he didn't care nothing about me being there.

"Mornin', Jimmie," says I. "Nice, fine mornin', ain't it?"

He lifted his head slow and turned it just as slow. His eyes had a kind of a glazy look and his face was tired like he hadn't slept none too well. Also he hadn't shaved that morning. That last was prob'ly the best indication of how he was feeling, for I couldn't ever remember the time when I had seen whiskers sproutin' on Jimmie's chin. They was there now all right, however, a growth of reddish brown stubble.

" H' are yuh, Hill," says he to me.

And that was the first time he had ever left the " Mr. Tom " offen the front of my name.

I knowed then that he was considerable upset.

" Nice, fine mornin', ain't it?" says I.

" Mebbe it is," he says. " Mebbe it isn't."

His voice was kind of thick and husky and the corner of his mouth lifted like the mouth of a dog that is considerin' taking a nip at your pants leg. I got up and walked out to Jimmie, and he stopped when he saw me do it. I guess his natural politeness got the best of his grouch for the minute, because I don't think he wanted to talk to me or to any one else.

" Going up toward the store?" says I.

" Why, I suppose so," he answers. " Where in hell else would I go?"

I was dumfounded as we begun to move along the sidewalk. That was the first time I had ever heard Jimmie Fraser swear, and it struck me as funny that he ripped out the word as glib as you please as if swearing was a habit with him.

" How is business?" says I.

" At the store?" he asks. " Why, it's all right, I guess. 'Lije is making money, but he isn't paying any of it to me that I can notice."

" Whyn't you hit him for a raise?" I asks.

He makes a kind of a sound in his throat that might have passed for a laugh, only it wasn't. I seen his eyes go bright all of a sudden, though. But he didn't say nothing.

" How is the missus?" I eased to him then.

Up went his head; he squared his shoulders.

" Very well, indeed," he says. " Better than usual, if that is possible. She is spending a few days at the beach to get away from the heat."

He was game, wasn't he? I could see plain enough, from what his mother had told me, and from the way he acted and looked, that there had been ructions between him and Sadie; but do you suppose he was going to blat it to the first person he met, even if that person was me? Not any.

" That's real nice," says I.

By now we had come to 'Lije's store, and Jimmie unlocked the front door and we went inside. One thing about me is that I can go into a store and laze around and nobody thinks nothing of it. Nobody ever asks me what they can do for me. They just kind of expect me to drop in sooner or later.

Now, this here 'Lije didn't run no dustless, flyless grocery store like you read of in some of the ads. He had been storekeepin' for any number of years, and I think some of the dirt that he started out with was still abidin' with him faithful and constant. The floor had a scum on it, and the flies wasn't ever on no hunger strike. And still he got the business—I dunno why.

" Puh!" says Jimmie. " Smells like a cussed morgue when I first open the door in the morning. Sickening!"

Swish! Across the room comes to me one of these here inspirations. I receive it with wide open arms and give it a hug of welcome.

" Jimmie," says I, " why don't you open a grocery store of your own? You know the grocery business and you wait on half the trade here. You got enough money to turn the trick. Why don't you go into business for yourself and quit makin' money for old 'Lije?"

Usually as soon as Jimmie got the store open he swept out and then put on his white jacket and was ready for customers. Now he didn't even take off his coat. He set down in a chair and pushed his hat back from his brown curly hair.

" Hill," he says, " you do get a valuable thought in that old nut of yours once in a while, don't you?"

" And you have begun to talk like one of them Scandahoovians that works along the ore docks," says I. " How do you get that way?"

" Oh, I'm a tough guy," he says. " Why not?"

" Why?" says I.

He fumbles around in his pockets, and I'll be danged if he don't lug out a box of cigarettes. He fishes one out, taps it on

his thumb nail, sticks it in his mouth, and puts a match to him. I watched him, fair fascinated. He drags the smoke down into his lungs and sends it steaming out of his nostrils.

"I didn't know you smoked them things," says I, in disgust. "When 'd you start?"

"Last night," he says. "I used to smoke 'em in school between training. I've been drunk, too. I got drunk one night after we won a football game. I used to be fullback on the eleven, you know, Hill."

"Full?" says I. "Sounds like drinking, anyways. Them cigarettes will kill you in time, Jimmie."

"Heck!" he says—only he used the unpolished word. "I used to smoke 'em in the army. We all did. They won't hurt me. Didn't I tell you I was a tough guy. Husky, too. Do you know how husky I am, Hill?"

"You look the part," I admitted.

"Me?" he asked. "Heck! I can lick any man in the United States of my weight. This night I got drunk I licked a waiter twice my size, knocked him through a window and stood him on his head in the gutter. I should think so."

"You been one of these whited sepulchers in this man's town," says I.

"Oh, no," he says, "I'm only septilateral. Every man is. When a fella shows only one side he is hanging a bluff. No, Hill, I've only been decent in this man's town. And what has it got me? Nothing! Posolutely nothing!"

"What's the trouble, Jimmie?" says I, soft.

"Who in heck said there was any trouble?" he asks, harsh.

We didn't pursue that no further, for just then in comes 'Lije. 'Lije is like a barrel of New Orleans molasses. He is round and tubby and from trying to please his customers he is sticky sweet. He wears baggy clothes and he is bald and has a fringe of most onsanitary whiskers on his chin. The kind of eye he has you can see in a fish after it has been out of the water for a while.

Well, when he first comes to work he is all hustle and bustle as a rule, trying to make his clerks think there is only five minutes left to do a day's work in. Generally Jimmie don't need no example from him. Jimmie is lighter on his feet than 'Lije, and he can give him a head start and beat him to any customer.

So when 'Lije sees Jimmie sitting in a chair smoking a cigarette, 'Lije comes as close to a stroke of apoplexy as a man can come and still not bust an artery.

"Why, Jimmie," he bleats, "what you doin'?"

"Nothing," says Jimmie, "and doin' it blank-blank well."

Say, that lad was becoming a finished swearer. There ain't no question about that. His oaths had a reg'lar sailor tang to them. He would have matched up very well with any of the sailors goin' aboard in the harbor for the out trip with a skin full of white liquor.

"Jimmie!" 'Lije cries. "You are swearin'!"

"Swearing?" says Jimmie. "Huh! that is mild. Wait till I get up a good head of steam."

"Well, why ain't you got your jacket on, ready for work?" 'Lije asks.

"Me?" says Jimmie, flicking his cigarette to the far corner of the store. "I'm through. I am not working in this dirty joint any more."

'Lije was between Old Nick and the briny water, so to speak. He seemed to want to have a stroke of that there apoplexy, and still he seemed to know he ought to chase that cigarette before it burnt his store down. All red in the face, he hops after the cigarette. He fishes it from under a crate and puts his foot on it.

"You tryin' to burn down my store?" he demands.

"Sure," Jimmie says. "Why not? They say fire is a great purifier."

'Lije turns round to me all flabbergasted. He takes off his hat and rubs his bald head. Then he sticks the hat back on and combs out his whiskers with his fingers.

"Crazy?" he asks me.

"Just mad, I think," says I.

'Lije turns back to Jimmie.

"Now, now, Jimmie—" he begins.

"Oh, go to heck!" Jimmie says.

"Mercy me, how rude you are!" 'Lije wails. "What have I ever done to you, Jimmie?"

"Cheated me," Jimmie states.

"Ch-cheated you?"

"Ch-ch-cheated me," says Jimmie.

Well, old 'Lije had been in business for a long time, and he had had to deal with all sorts of people. He don't need no ton of brick to fall on him to diagnose Jimmie's case—or at least he thinks he don't, which amounts to the same thing.

"Now, now, Jimmie," he says, "we will talk this matter over. How much a week am I payin' you now?"

"I'll give you three guesses," Jimmie answers, "though one ought to be one too many."

"Yes, yes," 'Lije says. "Twenty-two dollars a week. Why, that ain't a bad salary for a young man, Jimmie. At your age I worked for eight. You own your own home and you got money in the bank. You ought to get along fine, just fine."

"Yeh," says Jimmie, icy, "the fact that I own my own home and have a little money ought to accrue to your benefit, oughtn't it? You old skinner!"

"Now, now, Jimmie, hard names ain't no good. Let us—"

"I know hard names ain't no good," Jimmie says, gettin' up. "A hard fist in the pit of your tummy might be better."

He gives one hop and lands in front of 'Lije swinging his fist.

'Lije is paralyzed, ossified, pertrified, turned to stone, a roly-poly statue in a grocery store.

Jimmie stands grinning down at him, a grin that drew his lips back from his teeth in no very pleasant way.

"Shall I give you the solar plexus wallop?" he demands.

"God help me!"

'Lije's whisper goes through the store like a thin, fine wind. I think he expected the wallop all right, for he kind of scrunched down to keep his stomach out of harm's way.

"Jimmie," he pleads, "let us reason together. If you are seeking a raise in wages, I will give it to you. I will give you twenty-four dollars a week."

Jimmie's hand unclenched and he give a kind of flump down, drawing his own self together, like he had got a knockout and was trying to stay on his feet. I knowed of course that he was only mocking ol' 'Lije.

"Let me pass, vain old man," he says. "Let me pass ere I forget myself and strike you down."

'Lije let him pass all right, but as Jimmie reached the door he whispers in that strange new voice of his: "Twenty-six a week, Jimmie. Twenty-six."

In the doorway Jimmie flung up his hands and raised his eyes to the top of the door. "Never, vain old man," he cries. "Never in this world or in the world to come."

Then he goes out.

'Lije sat down. They say he sat there most of the forenoon, not noticing nobody. I lit out after Jimmie and caught him.

"Where away, Jimmie?" I asks.

"To that den of iniquity, the pool room," says Jimmie. "There I will squander my substance in riotous living."

Well, do you know, I couldn't quite figure that lad out just then? Seemed like he was just suffering from a kidding streak, and yet there was something cold and hard beneath the surface. I had a notion that he might do something serious before the day was over, and I decided to stick with him.

"Come along with me, Mr. Tom Hill," he says, "and watch me clean up that pool room gang."

"Why, Jimmie," I objects, "there is a bunch of sharks amongst them boys. They will beat you to pieces. They'll let you win a game or two and then they will get you to gambling and clean you out."

"Won't that be sad?" says Jimmie.

When we went into the pool room, there was Ike Miller sitting in one of the chairs ranged up against the wall for the loungers. Things couldn't have happened worse. Ike had always kept about three steps ahead of me and my jail. I knowed he was a bootlegger, but couldn't prove it. I knowed he was a gambler, but couldn't prove it. I knowed he was a sneak, and could prove that to my own satisfaction, no court of law being required.

He was a tall, angular fellow, and he had fingers like claws—long, thin, grasping fingers that could curl around a cue in a way that showed you right off that he could coax them balls wherever he wanted them to go.

Jimmie, however, bunts right into what is waiting for him. He didn't know Ike hardly to speak to, but he gives him a hail and a wave when he sees him sitting there.

"How about a little game, fella?" Jimmie asks.

"Pool?" says Ike.

"Pool."

Ike undrapes himself from the chair, goes and gets a cue, chalks it, and leans on the table with his hands. He don't say nothing. Jimmie also gets a cue. They play a game of twenty-five points and Jimmie wins.

Now, I know something about shooting pool and billiards, too, for that matter. I know as soon as a man takes hold of a stick whether he has learnt how to use it or not. Much to my surprise, Jimmie curls his fingers round his cue, the tip of the first finger restin' on his thumb, and his other fingers spread out in front. Also, which is the most important, he don't take hold of the butt end of the cue like he was taking hold of a poker to give a man a wallop with it. He just takes that butt in the tips of his fingers and his motion is straight back and forth with nary a jerk to neither side and his wrist is as flexible as a piece of wet leather.

"Gosh!" says I to myself. "This boy is a fullback that gets full, a fighter more'n likely, a tough guy, a husky guy, and now a pool player. And everybody has said he was a model citizen—except them that has said he was a mamma's boy. I'll say he is a fooler. He must have learnt a lot of things while he was away at college."

Of course I knowed what Ike was playing off and I had a notion Jimmie was. He won that game by the last ball he pocketed. This here Ike has a lean, swarthy face and his lips is pulled away in a perpetual sneer. Now he turns the light of that splendid countenance on Jimmie and sweetly says:

"I was off my game. You couldn't beat me again in a hun'erd years."

Jimmie sends a ball spinning and curving down the table out of his lean fingers.

"One dollar on each ball I beat you by or you beat me by," he says. "One hundred points."

"With Hill sittin' right here," says Ike with one of his pleasantest sneers.

I shifted kind of uncomfortable in my seat. I had a notion that Jimmie knowed what he was about. I couldn't get this here. Ike legally, and I was willing to get him illegally if I could. I had a notion that Jimmie could strip him for ten-twenty dollars.

"Oh," I says, "I guess once ain't goin' to do no harm. Jimmie and me is on a kind of a tear this forenoon, anyhow."

"Rack 'em up," says Ike.

"Rack 'em up, yourself," says Jimmie. "I won the last game."

"The *last* game," Ike sneers. "Yeh, the last game you'll ever win from me!"

"My break," Jimmie says. "Ever see a shot like this, sport?"

The three ball is stickin' up at the nib of the pyramid. Jimmie gets his cue ball to the far side of the table and Englishes hard and deep. *Ping!* That three ball drops into the pocket on the other side. Ike's eyes stick out.

Well, the game gets up to where Jimmie has seventy-five and Ike has sixty. It is Jimmie's break, and he makes that shot again and cleans the table. On the next break he banks the end ball into the corner and runs ten, makin' a straight run of twenty-five and winning the game.

Jimmie eases his cue along the table and puts his hands on the end rail. He looks at Ike, and his eyes ain't pleasant. Ike owes him forty dollars, and Ike parts with money with the same ease an elephant would climb a fireman's ladder.

"Come through, sport," says Jimmie. "Forty bones."

"Forty bones, huh?" Ike says. "With the town marshal sittin' right here ready to pinch me for gamblin'. I reckon not."

"Mr. Tom Hill," says Jimmie, "would you mind stepping to the door and seeing if you can note any change in the weather?"

As I started for the door I seen Jimmie start for Ike. Jimmie was all loose and

lanky, except for his fists—there wasn't nothin' loose about them. If I took any weather forecast it was the quickest on record, for I had barely looked at the blue sky when Jimmie come up to my side. He was folding up some bills.

"Collect it?" says I.

"Voluntary contribution," says Jimmie. "Well, so much for that. Let's see, I've quit my job and beaten the town shark at his own game. What next?"

He stood staring down at the sidewalk for a minute, his eyes glinting.

Then he laughs in that funny, new, hard way he has.

"I'm going to take these forty dollars and buy me a new car," he says. "Come on along to Fentress Brothers, Mr. Tom Hill."

Fentress Brothers was the town's auto dealers. I fell in step with Jimmie, and we went up the street toward their place.

"Jimmie," says I, worried, "are you crazy?"

"As a loon," he says, quite cheerful.

CHAPTER IV.

"I AM THE TRUCK HORSE."

WITHOUT no dickering, but with a snap and speed that made my old eyes pop out, Jimmie buys himself a new car, paying sixteen hundred and some odd dollars for it. He gets a slight reduction on it because it is a car that has been used for demonstration purposes. I could see that it was as good as a new car. Gee, it was a bird! It was a slender, graceful bird—a bluebird, in fact.

Jimmie pulls out a check book and dashes off a check for the full amount.

"Er—" says one of the Fentress Brothers.

"Call up the bank, if you want to," Jimmie says.

"Well, it's a rather big check," the man says.

I could see that he was kind of worried by the way Jimmie had dashed off the check—for Jimmie had no reputation in our town for handling money so free and easy. But in a few minutes he comes back, all smiles.

"Very good, Mr. Fraser," he says. "Will you take the car now?"

"That's me," says Jimmie. "Pile in, Mr. Tom Hill, and we will see what the real nature of this old boat is."

"Can you drive her?" I asks, kind of worried, for riding in a new car with a crazy man has possibilities—infinite possibilities, as the fellow wrote in a book.

"Huh!" Jimmie exclaims. "Haven't I been running 'Lije's truck off and on for a number of years? If a man can run that truck, he can run anything."

I loaded myself on board, and Jimmie got in behind the wheel. Fentress shows him a few things about the gears, and one thing and another, and we go out into the street. Well, Jimmie must have been one of these here born drivers. He just made that car sing.

It was the smoothest running car I ever had been in. The cushions was deep and wide and fitted a big man like me better 'n usual. I lolled back. The thing wasn't my funeral—at least not so far—and I was keeping an eye on Jimmie, which was my main object in life on this particular day.

We came out on the boulevard pretty soon, and there wasn't no cars in sight either way. The boulevard is new and smooth as glass. I didn't know we were doing anything special in the way of speed till I happened to look at the speedometer. It was showing forty-eight miles."

"Jimmie," I says, "you better slow down. I am an officer of the law, and the limit on this road is twenty miles."

"You are an officer of the law all right," Jimmie says, "but not where you are now. We have passed out of your township, Mr. Tom Hill. Don't worry."

Well, I had been having so pleasant a time that I hadn't noticed we had passed the township limits; but it was true, so I didn't say no more about speed. Jimmie drove thirty miles before he turned around.

"Fair kind of a boat, Mr. Tom Hill," he says.

"I didn't know you kept a checking account," says I, speaking of something that had been on my mind ever since he had wrote his check. "I thought you was keen

for savings accounts with the interest them draws."

"I transferred my funds to a checking account yesterday," he says. "A savings account is a tight little thing. A checking account is loose and easy."

"It's all of that from what I've seen," I agreed, dry.

When we come to the township line again, Jimmie turned into a crossroad and we went up to Rodgers Tavern, which is a swell eating place, patronized mostly by auto parties.

Jimmie led me to a table in the big dining room and we sat down.

"Eat hearty, Mr. Tom Hill," Jimmie says. "Let's knock a hole in Ike's forty dollars."

My appetite is no shy and shrinking thing as a rule, even when I cook my own meals, as I generally do. Now, with the white tablecloth and the white napkins and the gleaming tableware in front of me, my mouth began to water. I ordered a meal that one tray wouldn't hold. I wouldn't have been so generous with myself if Jimmie had been paying the bill out of his own pocket, but this Ike owed me considerable for trouble he had give me in the past, and this was one way of collecting. I don't toss money to the birds as a rule—can't do it—but I have a feeling that gambling money is best blowed as soon as possible.

Jimmie's check come to fourteen dollars, for they see you coming at the tavern, and we had knickknacks of one kind and another that cost like the dickens. Jimmie tossed the waiter a five and a ten and we beat it out of there without waiting for change.

"I got to get back to the bank and see old Abner Morehouse," Jimmie says. "I am going to arrange for a loan of three thousand dollars."

"What are you going to do—mortgage your house?" I says.

"If I have to," he says. "I need the money."

"I'd go slow on that mortgage game," says I. "A mortgage is a black shadow at your elbow till you get it paid off."

"Why," Jimmie says, "you put the idea into my head."

"Me? How?"

"You'll find out after a bit," he answers.

I waited in the car till he went into the bank. I was considerable worried about the boy by this time. I certainly didn't like the way he was acting and I especially didn't like the idea of his borrowing money.

Of course I knew he wasn't crazy, really. He was only riding high and reckless because he and Sadie had got into a jam. He was in the same kind of mood that used to cause some men to take to drink when they thought their troubles was more than they could bear—which ain't never the case. It's only that them birds think they are the only people in the world that has troubles. They can't keep their heads up in the face of it.

I was glad Jimmie was expending his mad in the way he was as against drink. A man used to be able to choose between drink and suicide, but nowadays the choice is one and the same. He can get drunk and commit suicide all in one grand splurge. If he gets hold of the right kind of bootleg liquor it ain't no very expensive proceedin', neither.

Well, pretty soon Jimmie comes out of the bank, all businesslike and snappy. He gets into the car and heads down the pavement toward the lake.

"Did you arrange for a mortgage on your home?" says I.

"Not on my home," he says. "Abner says I can have the money as I need it. I had other security to offer him."

"What kind of security?" says I, polite, not wishing him to think I was buttin' in.

"I haven't got the security yet," he answers; "but I will have it all in good time. All in good time, Mr. Tom Hill."

I slanted a keen look at him. He was out of a job. His mother wouldn't stake him. All he had was what remained of his bank account, and his home. Yet he talked of other security. Was he planning a robbery?

"Jimmie," says I, "you ain't forgot that there are laws in this country?"

"Too damn many laws, Mr. Tom Hill," he says. "Hold your hat and your breath."

I don't know just what speed he made on that road to the lake. I didn't dare look at the speedometer. He was in my bailiwick right enough now. But I knew 'twas useless to argue with him. Also, there was no way for me to stop the car. So I held my hat and my breath and let him flip.

"You goin' to meet your wife, Jimmie?" I asked as we turned in on the dirt road that led to another dirt road which in its turn led to the beach.

"I am going for to observe and possibly to admire," says Jimmie.

I didn't like the look on his face now. Heretofore it had been kind of lighted up from an inner excitement. Now that excitement seemed to have died in him. His face had kind of whitened out, takin' on a sort of burned out look. There was some lines in it, particularly one long line from about the middle of the side of his nose to the corner of his mouth. And the face was older, grimmer.

Why, says I to myself, this lad is suffering the tortures of the pit. I was sorry. I seen now that all his actions so far had been a kind of a cloak to cover up what he had been feeling.

But that was his own particular business and nothing for me to try to probe into. I think he would have walloped even me if I had gone too far.

When we come to the road that led direct to the lake, Jimmie didn't turn into it. He run the car up the road we was on for a little ways and then drove it up on the grass under a big maple tree.

"Let's hop down and stretch our legs," he says.

We was right in front of a field in which waist high corn was growing. Without a word Jimmie let himself through the wires of the fence and held two of them far apart so I could ease my tonnage through. Then we went down two aisles of corn toward the lake. Back of the cornfield there was a five acre wood patch and beyond that more corn. The end of this cornfield brought us to the bluff above the beach. This bluff was fringed with second growth trees and weeds and one kind and another of rough growing things.

When we come to it, Jimmie put a hand on my arm.

"Easy, Mr. Tom Hill," he says. "Easy does it."

He went forward and parted the bushes and stuff and I did the same. In a minute we was peering down on the beach. All we saw was the blue lake with the blue sky bending down to it far away and the sand beach with driftwood and shells and stones on it. Nobody was in sight.

"Ah," says Jimmie, "she isn't here!"

I knowed then that he had been hoping to get a look at his young wife when she didn't know that he was helping himself to the look—and that is a bad symptom in a young husband. Well, I felt pretty uncomfortable when I see just how the land lay. Mebbe it was all right for him to go snooping after his wife like this, but it was not any job for Mr. Tom Hill.

"There is nobody here," I says. "I think I will go back to the car and set in the shade and wait for you."

He took my left arm in one of these here grips of steel. I had to double up my fist to harden the muscles so that he wouldn't bite into the bone.

"Don't leave me, Hill," he says. "Don't leave me."

I glanced at him in surprise. He was all of a weak sweat. He didn't stack up like no fullback or champeen pool player or tough guy generally that could drink liquor and inhale cigarette smoke. He was more like a little kid that is about to feel the business end of a strap.

"Well, I don't like this business," says I. "I ain't no eavesdropper."

"I suppose you think it is a fine and thrilling experience for me," he says, hopeless. "Stick around, Tom."

"I—" I began.

"One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go!"

The young voice of the girl—whoever she was—rose high and sweet in the silence. I peered out and looked along the beach and Jimmie done likewise. For a minute I couldn't see nothing. Then around a shoulder of the bluff came five girls, running as hard as they could run. I reckoned they was summer visitors, for I had never seen

any of our girls in bathing suits like them. Them suits must have been made when there was an acute shortage of material.

But I dunno at that. Mebbe my being old and fat has something to do with it, but I ain't never been shocked none by the clothes the young girls has been wearing late years in our town. I don't see that there has been nothing dangerous to society in them clothes. Looks like to me they are pretty sensible.

Well, the bathing suits these young girls had on was mebbe a mite extreme, but if they was meant for swimming in I should have said that they wouldn't impede the swimmer none. And mebbe that is what a bathing suit is for. There was a considerable flashing of brown legs and arms and chests as the girls run their race along the beach in answer to that "one for the money" cry, but that didn't disturb me none.

I took a peek at Jimmie, and, by golly, he was smiling. You must remember that that boy had been brought up in a very strait-laced fashion, and I had expected a frown instead of a smile from him. I concluded that his college career had not been strait-laced. He was a man with a past, which he had hid when he come home from school. That was it.

"The young hoydens," he murmured. "Beautiful, aren't they, Mr. Tom Hill?"

"Lovely," says I, and they was all of that.

They was young girls, slim and straight and care-free like young girls should always be. They had rubber caps on their heads and their damp hair went floating out from under the caps. It was brown hair and black hair, and one girl had reddish hair that the sun glinted in.

Ah, me, I wished I was slim and young. I had never been that. Even when I was a boy I was a big fat lout. One thing I remember vivid about my mother was that she always told me I was welcome to all the food I needed for strength, but not to be a pig.

Well, me and Jimmie stood watching the girl and for the time Jimmie seemed to have forgot about what he had come to the beach for. His arms was folded and that smile still hung on his lips. Then one of the girls jumped up with a spring from her hands and legs.

I forgot to say they had throwed themselves down on the sand whilst we were watching them. She went down to the edge of the water and felt of it with her toes. She kind of shrugged herself together, though I knowed the water wasn't cold. She was mighty pretty as she stood there, prettiest one of the lot, I believed.

Then she turned around to the other girls and we had a full view of her face. Her chin was tilted and she was smiling so that we could see her white teeth gleam.

"Let's go in," she says in a high, sweet voice. "I'll bet I can stay under longer than anybody."

I glanced at Jimmie again. That smile had gone under a cloud. You could have laid a lead pencil in the furrow between Jimmie's eyes, and his lips was curled back like a wolf's, though I ain't never seen a wolf curl its lips. Anyhow, he was lookin' most forbiddin'.

"My wife!" he says under his breath. "My wife in that garb!"

It does make a considerable difference whose ox is gored. Jimmie had been all for them pretty young girls in what you might call an abstract kind of a way, but when some of the loveliness proved to be part of his own family, things didn't stack up quite like they done before.

So Jimmie stands there like a statue. The girls lined up at the top of the beach under the bluff. Sadie starts to count. Then they flew over the hard sand, jumped the rocks and shells at the edge of the water, jumped in, waded, splashing for a minute, and then started to swim. Their heads was just above water for a few seconds, then the heads disappeared, brown legs kicked above the surface, and then the slim bodies went under. One by one the heads come up till there was four of them. I had noticed that Sadie's cap was a flaming red; she kind of run to vivid things, you know; and the cap that didn't come up was the red one.

I don't suppose it was very long that me and Jimmie stood there on the bluff waiting for that red cap to show, but to me it

seemed like a long, long time. Fact is, I come to, to discover that I had been holding my breath.

"She'll be drowned!"

Jimmie said that; he must of, for there wasn't nobody else in sight to say it; but it certainly wasn't Jimmie's voice; it was a hoarse, dry, thick voice. I looked at him and found he was tearing off his coat and had flung his cap down on the ground. He gathered himself for a plunge down the bank, and I declare I felt my own muscles get kind of tight. I expect I would have followed him and broke my old neck in one wild, heroic roll to the bottom, but then there wasn't no need for heroes.

The red cap came into view, far out. It come up slow at first, the crown just showing. Then there was a flirt of water and Sadie's face emerged. She shook her head to get the water out of her eyes and rolled over on her back. I never see such grace in the water. She just lay on top of it, seeming not to move.

"Golly," says I, "Sadie is a water dog all right."

"Oh, she can swim," Jimmie agrees. "She has always lived on the lakes. I was afraid something had happened to her."

He talked kind of chokey and then he filled his lungs till his chest stuck out like a pouter pigeon's, and after that let out the air with a long, whistling sound. I expect he had been holding his own breath.

The other girls had come up on the beach and were sitting with their feet in the water.

"Who won?"

Sadie's voice came floating in and it was all joyous.

"You did," the other girls yelled back, and there wasn't even a tinge of jealousy in their tones.

Golly, they had got back to nature all right. They had partook of the sun and the wind when it was blowing and the blue of the sky and—and all the beauties of nature too numerous to mention; and there wasn't a touch of nothing mean or unkind left in them. They was having a gorgeous holiday while the big world droned and creaked some place far away.

"I wish she'd come in," Jimmie said, uneasy. "She might get a cramp."

As if she had heard him, Sadie rolled over and started to swim toward shore. She come in with long, easy strokes, her head half buried in the water.

When she reached the shallow places she stood up and gave the other girls a good splashing. There was a lot of laughing and yelling as them there nymphs splashed back and forth and then the four girls jumped up and ran along the beach, and Sadie took after them, her legs, which was whiter than the other girls', twinkling in the sun.

"Let's get out of here," Jimmie growled.

"Ain't you going down to see your wife?" I asked.

"I am not," he snapped.

"Jimmie," says I, as we trudged back through the cornfield, "have you and Sadie been to the beach this summer?"

"Naw," he says, "I been too busy."

"And her a water dog like she is," I sighed. "You used to be a good swimmer when you was a boy. Why don't you go down and rent a suit and take your wife in with you?"

"She is happy," he said, doleful as a sick cat. "Not for worlds would I disturb her happiness. She and I entered into a partnership some time back. In that partnership I am the truck horse and she sits high on the seat and swings the whip."

"Lash cut some, does it, Jimmie?" I asked, for this was close to a whine on his part and usually he didn't whine, whatever else he done.

"None of your cussed business, Hill!" he says, only the words he used wasn't refined like "cussed"; at that they sounded better than the high and lofty sentiment he had just uttered.

CHAPTER V.

JAMES THE WALLOPER.

WE spun pretty well over the countryside that afternoon. At night Jimmie took me to supper at the restaurant in our town. I filled up my tray, but Jimmie just took a slab of apple pie and a cup of coffee. He drank the coffee, but only nibbled at the pie.

"Good thing the country is dry, Jimmie," says I, suggestive.

"I wouldn't take a drink if it was as wet as Niagara Falls," he retorts. "That one night I told you about was enough for me. I'm no souse, whatever other kind of a chump I am."

Well, that was pretty good. Jimmie was in a mood as reckless as any I'd seen outside of the moods folks gets in moving pictures. I didn't know where he was going to end. I was glad that the liquor matter didn't appeal to him. I would have hated to see him go up against some of Ike's stuff.

When we had finished eating and I was feeling drowsy and contented, he led the way out to the car again. It was the time when people go up and down Main Street for their evening stroll and folks stopped and stared at Jimmie and me and at the car when we got into it. Jimmie just spun the car around in the road and left them there, goggle eyed. As I had kind of expected, he headed for the lake again. We parked the car in the same place.

Of course me and Jimmie knowed the park up above the beach like we knowed everything about this here summer resort and I wasn't surprised none when he headed for the dance pavilion. He had seen Sadie gay on the beach, and I knew he looked to find her gay on the dance floor.

He wasn't disappointed none. We crossed a field and came up alongside the pavilion. There was a row of glassless windows along the side nearest us, and we could see the dancers weaving in and out among themselves, trotting all the latest trots. After I thought I had give them all the once-over, I heaved a little sigh of relief. Sadie wasn't on the floor.

Jimmie begun to mutter to himself like a reg'lar villain in one of the old-time plays. I heard him say: "Some dark, secluded spot," and I guessed what he was driving at.

I give him a glance. He was standing straight up alongside me, his arms folded on his ample chest. His cap was pulled down over his eyes and his forehead was real puckered in a frown. His lip was lifted at the right side in what you would have most likely called a sneer.

"Well—" he begins, and then he stopped. He just leaned forward, as goggle eyed as any of those folks we had whirled away from in town. I followed the direction his eyes was taking. Across the pavilion I seen Sadie coming through the door.

Golly, she was pretty under the low-hung lamp above her head. I could see the sparkle in her eyes and the rose color in her smooth cheeks. She was dressed all in white and she had a bunch of red flowers at her waist.

For just about four seconds she stood there making me think of a little queen, though I don't know why, me not ever having associated none with royalty. Then she was surrounded by a bunch of young fellows. Looked for a minute like they was going to mob her. Then out of the press comes Sadie on the arm of one of them. I recognized him for young Billy Noyes.

We had lately got a big canning factory in our town down by the railroad tracks, and the father of this Noyes boy was the president of the company. Noyes, Sr., didn't live in our town, but this Billy and his mother had taken a cottage down by the lake for the hot months.

I had seen this Billy a number of times when he had come to town and he didn't make no great hit with me. He had fair hair and small blue eyes and a kind of hatchet face and he sported a mustache that looked like it was made out of duck's down. He made me think of one of these here young lords or something that I read are waiting on table here and there over our fair land of the free. I suppose he would have been surprised if he had knowed my opinion about him, for, to say the least, he was some fond of himself.

Well, him and Sadie hitched up in this dance, and I must say that they put the other dancers in the shade. This here young lord mebbe didn't know how to use his head, but he surely did know how to manage his feet. I guess things was kind of upside down with him; all his brains was in what I've heard called the pedal extremities. Sadie was as light on her own feet as thistledown, and the way them two went over the floor made me think of autumn leaves running along the ground be-

fore a soft, sweet wind. There wasn't no more effort in their motions than that.

Me and Jimmie stood and watched them till the dance was done, Jimmie scowling like all get out and me half smilin' to myself. I didn't see how Sadie's happy, lifted face could make anybody scowl, but of course I was not her husband.

When the dance was done, all the dancers clapped their hands and the orchestra busted out again whilst the dancers went round two-three times more. Then everybody piled toward the door leading to the beach. That was the way they generally done. They would have a dance or so and then they would go down in couples to look at the lake, *et cetera*.

The lads grabbed a girl here and a girl there till they was all outfitted in femininity and I noticed that Billy was hanging to Sadie's arm like grim death. They was one of the last couples to go out the door. As soon as they had passed under the light, Jimmie broke into a run toward the road. I waddled after him. When I come up on him he was standin' at the top of the slope that run down to the beach. A bunch of blackberry bushes hid him from the view of them that was going into the road. There was so many of them that Jimmie's run had carried him to the top of the slope before Sadie and Billy got there.

Just as I ranged up alongside of Jimmie, they come into view. I guess maybe Billy had detained Sadie some, for they were at the tail end of the procession. Just when they got to the edge of the slope, Billy stopped to light a cigarette. That widened the space between him and Sadie and the last of the others. He took hold of Sadie's arm and helped her down the bank. They was then not more than ten feet from us.

Carelesslike I put out a hand and laid it on Jimmie's arm. I discovered something then that I hadn't knowed before; that Jimmie boy had an arm like a rock, only now it was a kind of an unsteady rock. I could feel the muscles twitch and pull under my hand. I looked down and seen that Jimmie was clenching and unclenching his hands.

"Steady, son," says I.

"Shut your mouth," he whispered, fierce and hot.

I done it, tight. Why not? I could still feel them muscles twitchin' and pullin'.

Sadie and Billy was now halfway down the hill. I seen a band of dark curl round the white of Sadie's dress at the waist. Jimmie's muscles grew tight and hard. He crouched like he was going to spring. But he didn't spring; he just stood there kind of doubled up. For Sadie had escaped from Billy's arm. She whirled around, and even in that dim light I believed I could see the blaze of her fierce young eyes.

Smack!

Her hand had swung round in the air and it lighted on Billy's cheek fast and neat as any Dempsey punch. Then down the hill scooted Sadie. Billy, whose brain never was what you might call fast, just stood there, rubbing his cheek. His cigarette was still burning in his right hand.

Jimmie give his jump then and landed in the middle of the road. I stumbled down after him. By the time I got to where he had landed, he had Billy by the collar. He got behind Billy and shoved him up the slope and past me. 'Course I followed. I was a detective, getting details.

A hundred yards up the road Jimmie stopped and swung Billy around, lettin' go his collar as he done so. Billy staggered and teetered a little, then come to a stop. He fronted Jimmie with his face working time and a half. For a minute he couldn't speak. My, he was mad, madder'n I thought he had it in him to get.

"What do you think you're trying to do, you upstart?" he addressed Jimmie.

"Upstart?" says Jimmie. "Why, you—you parvunoo!"

"Parvunoo, huh?" Billy bleats back. "You grocery clerk, to whom do you think you are talking to?"

"You dancing master, I'm talking to you," Jimmie says. "And I'm goin' to push your face up among your back hair."

"When—next week?"

"Now. This minute!"

"Where would you prefer to wear your own face from now on—in the back of your neck?" Billy inquires.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

That is Jimmie laughing the idea to scorn. I could see that he had a notion

that one wallop from him would send Billy to a place where little birds would be singing roundelays.

But as for me, I was takin' a quick but sufficient inventory of this Billy man. I seen he stacked up a little different from what I had supposed. It was true that his legs was kind of spindly and his waist was what you might call waspish, but above that I'm danged if he didn't have a kind of a stocky look that I'd never noticed before. And his arms was long, longer than Jimmie's. Also his hands was knotted at the present time.

"Jingoes," says I to myself, "can it be possible that a man can wear a mustache like his an' dance like he can and attempt to hug a married lady and get his face slapped for his pains and still be a fighting man? To Jimmie's utter surprise and dismay, the same may prove to be true."

Well, they was standing there, glaring at each other, their fists beginning to swing a little and I knowed ructions was not far off.

"I will keep my sanity if you will not," says Billy, sudden. "Those people will be flocking up the hil in a few minutes. I do not wish to let them see me punching you all over the lot. I would suggest that we move up the road a piece so that we will be unnoticed and alone."

"Come right along," says Jimmie, though I could see an astonished look come creeping over his face like it was a long ways from home and didn't know how to get back.

However, Jimmie wheels around and marches off up the road. Billy follows him, and I trot alongside Billy.

"You're an officer of the law, are you not?" Billy asks me.

"Generally speaking," says I, "but this is my day off. Jimmie and me are on a tear."

"All I ask is that you do not interfere," he says, calm. "I intend to beat this man severely. I think he does not know that I am a boxer. I have boxed with some famous men."

"Jimmie packs a fair punch his ownself," I says.

"You just watch him land it," he says.

Some distance up the road Jimmie stopped. We was out of sight and out of sound of anybody that would come up the hill.

"This suits you as a battleground, does it?" Jimmie sneers.

Aristocrat though he was, this Billy seemed to believe in what you might call direct action. He come round in the road and let fly with his right fist all in one motion. Ping! Jimmie's jaw received the blow like it was a bird coming home to its nest. Well, Billy was a boxer all right, I could see; but he would have to more than box if he expected to leave any permanent reminder with Jimmie. Jimmie just took that blow, ate it up, and came in for more. He got more—two or three smart blows on the mouth and jaw. They only made him shake his head like he was annoyed some. Then—smash! he let fly a wallop that connected with Billy's nose.

Billy's nose responded right amiably. He had to stop and get out his handkerchief and wipe the red flow away. I think he must have knowed what kind of a gentleman he was dealing with in Jimmie, for he let down his guard while he nursed his nose. Jimmie didn't hit him while he was doing it.

"You can go down on your knees and apologize for your actions and that will be all of this," says Jimmie.

"Huh!" says Billy, and he squares away again.

He weaves in with his shoulders moving back and forth and his hands going in little circles. Jimmie stands stock still, contempt in his eyes. Billy makes a pass or two and tries for a right swing, starting it short. It got home all right, but there wasn't nothing back of it. He wasn't a boxer that could land a knockout with his fist a foot or so from the mark. Then Jimmie's right fist went straight home.

Billy tried to block, but he was a shade too slow. The fist caught him on the side of the jaw and it had all Jimmie's young strength behind it. Billy tottered; his knees buckled; a drawn look come into his face; down he went. He lay still.

Gosh, it was a knockout and I had never seen one before. I creaked down beside Billy and began to rub his hands. I didn't

know but what he was dead. A glance over my shoulder showed me that Jimmie was standing apart, a little white around the gills, but still scornful.

Presently Billy opened his eyes. First only the whites showed and then the rest of them come down to their proper position. He give a kind of a groan and I knowed that the time for ordering flowers for him had not yet come.

"Lemme help you to your feet," says I.

"Hands off!"

Jimmie's hand was on my shoulder; his commandin' voice was in my ear. I looked up.

"Gee whiz!" says I. "You ain't going to hit him again, are you?"

"He gets the wallop till he goes to his knees and apologizes," says Jimmie.

I looked down at Billy again. A sudden flare of anger comes into his grayish face. He rolls over and puts his hands under him and tries to lift himself up, but he can't quite make it. I lifted him to a sitting position. He sits there in the middle of the road for a minute in silent meditation. Then he gets to his knees and bends his head. His voice just reaches me, kind of chokey and gaspy.

"I haven't got the punch," he says. "I apologize for my actions. If I had the punch I would knock off your head and kick it from here to the beach."

I didn't know if that would pass for an apology with Jimmie or not, but it seemed to. Billy staggers to his feet and picks up his cap, which had been jarred off. He turns in the general direction of the beach and starts to stagger away.

"One thing more," says Jimmie. "Don't you speak to my wife again—ever."

Billy doesn't turn around; too much effort, I guess.

"What if she speaks to me?" he asks. "Shall I snub her?"

"She won't," Jimmie cries, and there is a great note of triumph in his voice.

Well, well, my old heart give quite a jump. After all his fussing round he still has a high and exalted faith in his Sadie!

Billy departs, and we go back to the car. I climb in very weary.

"Whereaway now, James?" says I. "Haven't you got to the point where a bed would look good to you?"

"I suppose I must rest," he answered. "I don't feel like sleep, however. Yes, I'll try to rest. I have a big day ahead of me to-morrow."

"Where you going to leave your car, Jimmie?" I says.

"Hadn't thought of it," he says.

"You can put it in my barn if you don't think my flivver would contaminate it," I says.

"I'll take a chance," says he.

When we had put the pretty car to bed, Jimmie stops outside the barn door.

"Seems as if I couldn't go to my own house to-night," he says in a deep and mournful voice. "I guess I'll go to the hotel."

"Come into my house and I will bed you down for the night," says I. "You are in for a wakeful night, anyhow, so I'll make a pot of coffee. That will keep you awake. No use doing a thing by halves."

Half an hour later with three cups of my strong coffee under his belt he retired to rest on the davenport in my parlor. I set and smoked a while and thought of this and that, especially of the ways of young folks in times of stress. Before I went to my bedroom I took a peek in at Jimmie. He was laying on his back, one arm flung up over his head.

"Jimmie," I whispered.

No answer. Not a move from the long figure on the bed. In spite of heartbreaking trouble and strong coffee, Jimmie was far away in bylow land. I turned in, and in a few minutes I was there myself. I found Jimmie there, and him and me had some most amazin' adventures before the morning sun shining on my face brought me back.

CHAPTER VI.

METHOD IN MADNESS.

"WHAT now?" says I.

Me and Jimmie had finished our coffee and bacon. We set back and I lit a good cigar.

"Have a smoke?" says I.

"Nope," says Jimmie. "I had my little fling at cigarettes yesterday. I was just trying myself out. I wanted to see if I could go wild and free for a day and then put on the brakes. The brakes are all set. For me not a thing to-day but business. You notice the keen, determined look on my face, don't you, Mr. Tom Hill?"

He was smiling with his lips, but there was a kind of a sad look in his eyes. He looked older, too. I expect he had lived more in that yesterday than I had suspicioned. Things was happenin' to Jimmie, but I wasn't much worried this bright morning as to what the end would be. I had a notion that there was method in Jimmie's madness.

"Will you drive into the city with me?" he asks.

"I will go anywhere with you, Jimmie," says I.

"You are a pretty good scout at that, Mr. Tom Hill," he says. "Let's go."

My conscience give me a little dig when I thought that maybe I wasn't playing quite square with Jimmie, but I give it a kick in the ribs and it lay down. For a fact, I was sort of spying on Jimmie, but I meant to stick along with him, so I wasn't double-crossing him none.

We had a nice ride into the city, and Jimmie put the car in a garage down town. We walked several blocks and come to a place that was all big warehouses. You'd have thought there was enough stuff in them to feed and shoe and clothe the world. One place was labeled "Wholesale Groceries," and Jimmie led me into that. He asked a man sitting at a desk where Mr. Morgan was, and the man sent him along an alley, and we come to a little cubbyhole of an office where a baldheaded man was sitting, and the baldheaded man was very pleasant to Jimmie and kind of beamed when Jimmie said he wished to buy a stock of groceries for a new store that he was starting in our town.

Well, I rolled along after them two brisk people while they went in and out among the alleys of that warehouse. Jimmie looked things over and then we went back to the cubbyhole and I sat in the doorway, not wishing to take up all the left-over room there was, and Jimmie and beaming Baldy sat down and talked things over, and then a girl come in and wrote a list of things as long as my arm and the baldheaded man bowed us out, after telling Jimmie that he knew his business and could not fail in his venture.

"Oh," says Jimmie, "my store is to be a cash store and I'm paying cash. You can draw on me to-day for the full amount. I will let you know when to ship."

"Very good, Mr. Fraser," says Baldy. "Very good, indeed. Let us hear from you from time to time. We shall be interested in knowing how you get along and our Mr. Kennerly will call on you as he goes over that territory."

"Good day," says Jimmie, very dignified.

We went out and went along the street and come to a place where they had showcases in the windows. In we went.

"Show me," says Jimmie in his new, high manner, "dustless, flyless showcases to outfit a modern store."

I let Jimmie buy them showcases all by his lonesome. I went out on the sidewalk and lit a cigar and stared up the street with unseeing eyes, as they say. I was getting the correct slant on Jimmie, I thought. Yesterday he had been just plain and simple mad. He had been busting out at the pores because Sadie had flew the home nest and was having a good time all by herself at the beach, apparently giving not a backward thought to her hard working, washing machine buying but nonetheless loving husband.

But now I seen that Jimmie was taking a high dive that would land him in the swimming pool of success or break his neck. The question was would the people of our town take to a cash store. Jimmie could undersell 'Lije all right on an even break and he could undersell him because 'Lije was an old robber on general principles. There was three other grocery stores up and down Main Street, but it would be 'Lije that Jimmie would have to buck chiefest. 'Lije had been in business a long time. He carried customers, lots of them from the farm districts, for long spells when things wasn't breakin' very good for nobody. Could Jimmie make a go of it when every

time a man bought a bag of salt he had to throw the cash on the counter? Well, time would tell. The trouble might be that Jimmie wouldn't have enough time.

Of course the flyless, dustless idea would go over all right. 'Lije's store was plumb dirty and flies considered it a good roosting place. And there wasn't nothing to keep the dust off the stock. Some of it had collected considerable in the course of time. However, a customer will put up with flies and dust to get his groceries, if he hasn't got the cash and can get the credit.

When Jimmie come out I give him the results of my meditations. He was striding along the street toward the garage where he had left his car and I was toddling fast and furious to keep up with him.

"I'll get the cream of the trade, Mr. Tom Hill," he says. "I'll get the customers that have the money and who will appreciate a clean stock. I won't have to carry a big stock either. I'll have a quick turnover. 'Lije don't know what a turnover is. He thinks it's a kind of pie. I can't lose."

"That's half the battle—thinkin' you can't lose," says I. "I wish you well."

"I had a long talk with myself the other night," Jimmie says. "I tumbled to the fact that I have been 'Lije's biggest asset. One reason why 'Lije has got a big stock of left-overs on his shelves is that I've been selling the fresh stock to the people I've waited on. I had no ulterior motive in that. I just didn't like to hand stale stuff out to live customers. I let 'Lije do that. Folks are going to remember that. To them the name of James Fraser will be synonymous with fresh goods and prompt service. I can't lose, Mr. Tom Hill. Oh, did I say that before? Well, repetition does no harm. Here's a hole in the wall. Let's get a bite to eat. I have no time to lead you to a banquet to-day. Am I not full of business, Mr. Tom Hill? I am. Thank you!"

Ten minutes elapses between this and the next act. We are then headed for the garage. I have a rather heavy feeling in the pit of my stomach. I had to commit assault and battery on my food to keep up with Jimmie.

"Here's the garage," says Jimmie. "Here's the car. Hop in while I pay the man. All right! We're off in a bunch."

The car ate up the road back to our town. Me and Jimmie didn't talk none. I had to keep my face turned sidewise to prevent me from gulping mouthfuls of rushing air. Jimmie hung to the wheel, his eyes to the front. That boy could drive, believe me. He missed any number of cars by a hair, but, lucky for us, a hair is enough.

When we come into our town, Jimmie drove up in front of a building three doors from 'Lije's place. It used to be a hardware store, but there was two in town and they consolidated, and this building had been empty for six months. It had begun to be a dusty, cowbebby kind of a place, but just now the dust and the cobwebs was disappearing. All the carpenters and near carpenters and painters and near painters in town was on the job, makin' a total of six. White paint was flowing like liquor in a barrel house in the old days and saws was whining and planes singing up and down the room.

Me and Jimmie went in and took a look around. When we went outside, me being speechless at all the action Jimmie was getting, a wagon drove up. The front of the store had been sloshed all over with white and I see there was a sign in the wagon. The men looked at Jimmie.

"Unload it, men," says Jimmie in his new, crisp way. "Stick it up across the front above the windows."

The men had ladders and the sign was soon in place. It had big gilt letters on a black background. "James Fraser, Grocer," it read. I stepped back to the curb and looked at the store front as a whole. Jimmie joined me.

"How do you like the onsomble?" Jimmie asks me.

"Where is it?" I says.

"How do you like the general effect?" Jimmie inquired, patient.

"Oh," says I. "Why, this town has never seen nothing like it. You will have trade for a few days. After looking at the front you are putting up, folks will want to see the works."

"Mr. Tom Hill," says Jimmie, "you are a wise old hen. Damnfewe'renot."

Do you know that I was kind of pleased at that. You can see that Jimmie was going up in my regard. He would therefore go up in the regard of the rest of his fellow townsmen and townsladies. Why not?

So it proved to be. Folks coming along stopped to look, to admire, and to ask questions. Flyless, dustless! Jimmie played the harp on them two words till you'd have expected the flies to die of shame and the dust to collect in little shivering huddles and never ride the wind again. Germs! Jimmie told his hearers how many germs there was on a gain of dust and on a fly's whiskers till I was ashamed of him. I could have stood for it if he had referred to them germs in terms of thousands, but—well, he didn't even use millions. Billions was his nice, safe and sane figure. And, for a fact, 'most everybody nodded their wise heads in agreement. It was funny how widespread the knowledge of germs suddenly become.

"And a brand new stock," says Jimmie. "Not just at first, but always. A quick turnover means a new stock all the time and the ambition of my life will be to give my customers a quick turnover."

The people he had been making this speech to passed along, and for a minute there wasn't nobody with us. Then a voice back of me says:

"Somebody must have been givin' you a quick turnover, sport. Look at your face."

For a fact folks had been looking at Jimmie's face all along, but they had been so interested in the new store that they hadn't been able to divide their interest and wonder what made the marks on Jimmie's face. They had come from some of them blows that Billy had landed.

I turned around to see who was butting in, and Jimmie wheeled in one big revolve. It was Ike, as I had suspicioned it was. He was standing out in the street grinning a yellow toothed grin.

"Why, hello, Ike!" Jimmie says. "Come up here."

Surprised, Ike come up to the curb. Jimmie put a hand on his shoulder and give a real loud laugh.

"Funny about my face, isn't it, Ike?" he asks. "Yes, yes, very funny. Makes you laugh, doesn't it?" I give Jimmie's face a glance and I see that while he was laughing his eyes was blazing. "Ha, ha, Ike!" he goes on, and then his voice drops. "You dirty bootlegger," he says, "if you say anything more to me or about me, I'll bust you wide open! You get me?"

Ike goes goggle eyed and backs away. Jimmie's fingers only bit into his shoulder.

"I—I get you," Ike kind of whispers.

"Beat it, then," says Jimmie.

Ike done so, immediate. I stared at Jimmie. I felt like he must have had one of these here reincarnations that you hear about. He wasn't the same Jimmie he had always been, not nohow. He was as different as an airplane is from a stage coach.

Our next visitor was 'Lije. I had seen him peeking out of his door and getting up his nerve to come and have a closer look. In one of his peeks he seen that my eye was on him and that all was lost, so he let himself down from the sill and waddled up to us.

"What you up to, Jimmie?" he asks in a faint, thin voice.

"How many guesses, 'Lije?" Jimmie says.

"I s'pose you are figgerin' on startin' a grocery store?" 'Lije says, mournful.

"I *am* starting a grocery store," Jimmie comes back. "I passed the figuring stage long ago."

"Now, Jimmie—" 'Lije starts.

"Stow it, 'Lije!" Jimmie breaks in. "I know you are going to say that there isn't room in this town for two first class grocery stores. I know it. That's why I'm starting this one. Besides competition is the life of trade. I'll give you a run for your money, 'Lije. I'll at least make you invest in a mop and a broom. Let the best man win and may the devil take the hindmost."

'Lije stood looking at Jimmie with his jaw sagging down. He acted like he had never met Jimmie before, and at that he hadn't—not this Jimmie.

"Are you intoxicated, Fraser?" he asks.

"Exactly!" Jimmie laughs. "I am intoxicated with the first big drink from the goblet of anticipated success."

"*I'd* say some of Ike's white licker," says 'Lije.

there was that matter of the twenty dollar bill which I had give her as coming from the aforesaid. And me probably the worst explainer that the world has ever known.

I kept a weather eye on Jimmie when I went into the store. If there happened to be anything in his looks that indicated he had received notice from Sadie that he had been the donor of that twenty dollars, I would have to see about several matters which I had been neglecting. Them matters would be attended to some distance from the new store also. But all seemed still to be joyful with Jimmie. He beamed on me like a man that has either been drinking or is on his way to a certain cellar some place.

"Mr. Tom Hill," says he, "this store is a success. It is a huge success."

"May it be huger," says I, reaching for a cracker barrel that wasn't there and then bringing my hand up to scratch my ear, carelesslike. "I—"

Dogged if I could ever remember what I had been about to say. For there was a slender shadow along the floor. I looked at the door and give a kind of a gasp. A lady had come to call! Yes, yes, and she had a little flat purse in her hand, and I had an idea that purse held what was left of my twenty dollar bill.

"Why, Mrs. Fraser," says I, and I got to my feet and started toward her.

It had been in my mind to give her one of these here stage whispers. I was going to tell her to be mum about the twenty and I would explain at the first opportunity, convenient or inconvenient. But Sadie was halfway down the store by the time I got to my feet, and when I reached her she was fairly close to where Jimmie was standing. And the silence in that store was the deepest thing yet. I hadn't never knowed that silence could be so silent. Any whisper that might have issued from my lips would have been like a yell. So I just shook hands with Sadie and give the order for retreat.

Sadie's handshake was kind of loose instead of being quick and snappy as usual. Her eyes was looking beyond me toward her husband. I think she had come primed for a reconciliation, but Jimmie was standing with his arms folded and his hand on his chin. Of course he was looking at her, but there is a difference in looks. Instead of looking at his pretty young wife Jimmie might have been looking at a cord of wood piled crooked. Sadie's eyes were a bit questioning for maybe an eightieth of a minute and then they went as hard as diamonds. Billy had disappeared into the back of the store.

"May I be served?"

Hers was not the voice of a foreign diplomat at an American peace meetin'. She was showing in her tone just how she felt about matters as they stood.

"Certainly, madam."

I think Jimmie had maybe a slight edge in his tones of the two of them, but just to be fair as between husband and wife I called it a toss-up. Jimmie come forward, deferential as a block of ice. Sadie takes a slip out of her pocketbook and hands it to him.

"Fill that," says she, "and deliver it to my house."

"We do not deliver, madam."

Sadie looked at me with her eyebrows lifted up and her eyes steely. She seemed to be inquiring of me as to what kind of a joint this was. Jimmie's back was to me, and I took the occasion to indulge myself in some more or less agile pantomime, endin' by pointing to the pocketbook and shakin' my head most vigorous. I didn't think she would get me, for I don't pantomime none too well, I expect, but I'll be swizzled if she didn't flash a tiny smile at me and shake her head.

I leaned back in my chair and drew in an extra long breath.

"Just what kind of a store is this?" she says to Jimmie.

"Cash-carry," he said, still icy. "Flyless, dustless, new stock, courteous service, all goods guaranteed or your money back—if you happen to have paid any money. I may say that we extend credit to no one—rich or poor, white or black, Democrat or Republican, golf player or back yard gardener."

"You may fill my order," she says.

Her order only fills two baskets and three of them paper bags with handles to 'em. Jimmie did some rapid totting up on Sadie's slip of paper.

"Sixteen dollars and twenty cents," he says.

"How much stock will I own in the store when I pay that?" says Sadie.

"None," Jimmie snaps. "I am the sole proprietor and owner of this place."

Sadie opens her purse and counts the money in it. I see by the look on her face that she hasn't quite enough. She turns to me and her smile is fair bewitching.

"Would you be honored to lend me seventy cents, Mr. Tom Hill?" she asks.

Dog-gone her pretty eyes, she was threatening me, threatening to reveal that I had already made an investment in her direction. I got up quick and fished a dollar from my pocket. Jimmie, from the look on his face, seemed to be entertainin' forty intentions all at once, but he didn't act on none of them. He just took Sadie's money, including my dollar, and made the change. Sadie handed thirty cents to me, and I had a feeling that there was something significant in the amount.

I went back to my chair and sat down. Sitting down had never been quite so welcome. I kept my eyes on Sadie. She placed a hand on her hip, lifted her head, and smiled, looking beyond her husband.

"Will you be so kind as to phone to the garage for my car?" she inquires.

"Your—your car?" Jimmie gasps.

"My car," she repeats. "I was informed two days ago that I had a car. Of course, if I have not—"

And she give her shoulders a shrug like a heroine in a moving picture.

"Why—er—yes, of course," Jimmie gasps. "Certainly, madam."

He phones to the garage and they send up the new boat.

"Will you be so good as to put my groceries in the car?" Sadie asks.

Jimmie done it.

Sadie waited just where she had been standing.

"I can't drive my car," Sadie says when Jimmie come back. "That is to say, I don't drive my car. I don't know where my driver is. When I came in here I noticed a young man disappear toward the rear. If he can drive this car, please have him do so."

Again Jimmie flew signals of several intentions, but finally he took off his apron and put on his cap.

"I'll drive the car," he says, sullen; and he waited for her to start for the door.

"Trot right along," says Sadie, flippant. "I have some other shopping to do. It's a mercy that I can get credit at the other stores. I live at No. 20 Woodward Avenue. Please deliver at the rear door. My maid will take the things. Please do not blunder in the delivering. I need the groceries. I am entertaining this evening."

Jimmie nearly dropped the basket he had picked up, but he caught a new grip on it midway to the floor and toted it out to the buggy. When he had drove away, Sadie turned to me.

"Have you a pencil, Mr. Tom Hill?" she asks.

I give her a pencil, and she tore off a piece of wrapping paper and wrote on it. She put the paper on the counter and returned my pencil to me. Then she bade me good day and floated out of the store.

Jimmie was back in a few minutes.

"Using a boat like that for a delivery truck," he said, getting into his apron. "Huh!"

"The lady left a note for you on the counter," says I.

He pounced on the note like it was a grasshopper ready to hop. He read it through eager and then he turned his eyes on me. I looked down at my right shoe.

"I better be gettin' over to the shoemaker's and have a patch put on that place," says I. "The seam is ripped, I noticed this morning when I put that shoe on."

"Just a minute," Jimmie snapped.

He went to the cash register and took out some money, a bill and some change. He brought the money over to me and held it out.

I knew no bluff would go. I took the money.

"If you were younger I'd bust you wide, Hill," Jimmie grated.

Well, I have heard a considerable of that kind of talk in my lifetime, and I ain't overly fond of it.

"If I was younger you couldn't," says

"Yes, sir," says Billy, and goes and gets the apron.

He makes a dive for the first customer that comes in. He gets by fairly well, though he has to ask Jimmie about locations and prices.

Well, that was a large morning for Jimmie. The customers come so fast that I went over and took a look through the window of 'Lije's store at a time when Jimmie was real busy. 'Lije was monarch of all he surveyed, but he had mighty few subjects. One woman was in the store and she was looking around kind of disconsolate, like she had got into the wrong pew.

I went home and got me some lunch when Jimmie went, and I fairly bolted my food, but Jimmie was back at the store ahead of me. I seen him go by my house while I was having my second cup of coffee. I stacked my dishes, a thing I hadn't done in a long time, but I didn't want to miss nothing of what was going on.

As I went out into the street I seen Elizabeth, Jimmie's mother, hurrying toward me. She was panting and her face was red when she come up to me.

"Ma'am," says I, "have you been in our new store?" For a fact I get to saying "our" about everything new that happens along in our town, and I just felt like I had an interest in Jimmie's enterprise. I mean a financial interest. "It is a first class, flyless, dustless, creditless store," says I to Lizzie. "You'd be surprised."

The flush died out of her face and she fixed me with a hard and glitterin' eye.

"Hill," she says, "what have you done?"

"About what?"

"You know about what. I hired you to watch that—that woman and you have not done it. You have aided and abetted James in his mad enterprise. He will bankrupt himself. Why, I hear you went with him and aided and abetted him when he bought an expensive car."

"That was the easiest aidin' and abettin' ever I see a man do," says I. "Why, I would have had to hit your son over the head with a piece of cast iron pipe to have stopped him."

"That woman is back at my son's home," she says. "She came in from the beach this morning. And she has a colored servant there."

"Jennie?" says I, chuckling as I got ready to spring a good one that I remembered sudden. "Why, Jennie ain't colored; she was born that way."

"You permitted that woman to return to my son's house," she exploded, ignoring my pleasantry.

I not only get the news as it happens, but I get the details of it. Many a time I have made a good story out of a poor one for Royal Selden's newspaper.

"I just happen to know," says I, "that that house is half Sadie's. That's the way Jimmie had the deed made. I seen the entry in the records."

"Oh, my good Lord, is that so?" says Elizabeth. "What madness will James be up to next?"

"Well, it may prove to be a good arrangement in this case," says I. "You see, Sadie can occupy part of the house and Jimmie can occupy the other half."

"Are you working for me or for that—that woman?" she asks, spiteful.

"I am employed by the town," says I, kind of peppery. "That's the only job I got."

She shot a look at me that was as fast and flary as lightning.

"You are not working for me," she says. "I don't trust you. That creature has you under her influence. You wouldn't report anything about her if you knew anything."

"You are wrong about that, Mrs. Fraser," says I, solemn. "I'm reporting to you right now that Sadie is one of the nicest little girls I know. I am for her by a handsome majority, and the returns ain't all in yet from the outlying precincts."

Elizabeth made an angry sound that there ain't no letters to describe. It was such an ugly sound that she nearly choked on it. Then she wheeled around and left me flat.

"*Bon voyage,*" says I, "and a long journey away from me."

I went off down the street, quite agitated for an old fellow that could pass through a cyclone and only wonder how hard the wind had blowed. So Sadie was back, eh? She had come to investigate the doings of her so-to-speak lord and master, huh? And

there was that matter of the twenty dollar bill which I had give her as coming from the aforesaid. And me probably the worst explainer that the world has ever known.

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I, stiff and formal. "Fact is, you would have to step some to do it right now. The old man ain't never been knocked out yet."

He stood looking down at me for a minute and then he kind of half laughed.

"You're a case, Mr. Tom Hill," he says.

"I'll get that shoe fixed on my way to supper," says I, easing back in my chair.

Jimmie leaned down to me and said in a whisper:

"What do you think my—S—er—she meant by saying that she was entertaining to-night?"

"Why," says I, "I think she meant that she was entertaining."

"Indeed?" says Jimmie, straightening up.

"What's more," says I, calm, "I think, judgin' from the quantity and the quality of the groceries she ordered, that this is going to be a deserted village to-night exceptin' at your house. I think your house will look like a mass meeting will be held."

He heaved a long and bitter sigh.

"For me," he says, "turn down an empty glass."

"Why," I says, shocked, "there won't be no drinkin'."

"I speak in figures, Tom," he says, doleful.

"Figures seem to be in order, judgin' from the adding up you had to do on Sadie's grocery list," says I.

"She can have the whole stock for all I care," Jimmie declares.

The phone rang. Jimmie answered and said the call was for me.

Sadie was on the other end of the wire. She give me a bid to her party.

"Why, ma'am," says I, polite, "I'll think it over."

"You can bring your friend with you if you like," she says.

"What friend?"

"Why, the sole proprietor."

She hung up, and I broke the news to Jimmie about the both of us.

"How sweet of her," Jimmie snaps. "But you go, Mr. Tom Hill. I insist that you go."

I knowed he would be wanting a report, so I said I'd go. I was in the thing up to my neck, and I figured I might as well go a little farther even if I should have to tilt my chin to breathe through my nose.

CHAPTER VIII.

SADIE ENTERTAINS.

NOTHING much puts a stop to me when I get going good. I expect I should have been kind of timid about going to Sadie's party, considering what an old hulk I am and what a lot of young folks would be there. But, shucks, I've knowed every young person in our town from the time they was kids. I've seen 'em grow up from pigtailed girls or dirty faced boys to what they are now. I don't think there is any call for me to let a bunch of them youngsters put my eye out.

Besides, I had a navy blue suit that I had been planning to wear on the first special occasion that popped up. I have to have my clothes made to order on account of my size, and Bob Saxton had put a white fringe around the vest of this here suit. I had a new blue tie, too, and a pearl stickpin that was give to me by a lot of my admirers one election day when there was a move to beat me as marshal and I got about all the votes that was cast.

My hair is gray, of course, but there is still plenty of it, and I had Tom Singleton, our barber, trim it up and give me a close shave with a few hot towels. I got out the gold headed cane that my dad used to carry, and as I stepped down from my front porch I didn't reckon that any of the gents at the party would have anything on Mr. Tom Hill in what Bob Saxton calls sartorial effect.

I was some early at the party, it being only a bit after seven when I got there, and I rung the bell, and Sadie come to the door. Golly, she was looking fine. She had picked up a little tan durin' her stay at the beach and her eyes must have gathered some of the sunshine in them, they was that bright. She told me to step in, but I said I would take my ease on the porch, and she come through the screen door and give me a shake of the hand. I had taken off my hat, and I was standing with

it in one hand and my cane in the other, under the electric light.

Sadie stood looking at me, kind of half smiling.

"Why, how very distinguished you look, Mr. Tom Hill!" she said. "Actually you are one of the handsomest men I know."

"Oh," says I, in a kind of a society manner, "clothes make the man. A tailor and a barber can trim up an old hulk till it looks like a seaworthy craft."

"Your figures of speech are very original, Mr. Tom Hill," says Sadie. "Take this chair over here and I will have Jennie bring you an ice."

I didn't quite get that, but it was only a kind of a thin ice cream that Jennie brought and put on the table beside me. It didn't bother me none to absorb that. Sadie sat down by me, and I lit a cigar, and we was quite at our ease.

Pretty soon the boys and the girls began coming, and I give them a wave of the hand and a bow from where I sat. I knowed 'em all, so Sadie didn't have to waste her breath in no introductions. That was that, but pretty soon a couple of big, shiny autos drove up and a bunch of strangers piled out.

As the girls come up the steps ahead of the boys, I could feel my face grow a bit warm. They was inexpensively dressed, for even if the cloth in their dresses cost a lot a yard there wasn't enough of it to make the bill mount. And most of the boys was dressed in these here short, dinky coats with low vests that show a lot of shirt front. I thought I had it on 'em in the matter of clothes.

Well, for a minute I thought the town boys and girls wasn't going to get on very well with the strangers. The boys eyed them "tuxes," as I learnt them coats was called, and they didn't seem to think so much of them; and the girls looked kind of cold and distant when they took a peek under cover at the clothes the stranger girls wore. But that didn't last more'n five minutes. There was some music inside, and I looked through the window and see that Jennie was presidin' at the phonograph with a big stack of records beside her. I seen that everything was cleaned out of the sitting room and the dining room, and as soon as the music started the boys and girls begun to dance. I looked at the dancing for a minute and then I pulled my chair to the front of the porch and put my feet on the rail and looked up at the stars.

One thing that gratified me was that Sadie wasn't dancing; she was moving back and forth among her guests, seeing that all the girls had partners and that a good time was being had by all, as our paper used to say before Royal Selden took hold of it and chopped out all that personal stuff. Hick stuff, he called it, but I had always found it kind of int'resting.

Pretty soon Sadie come out on the porch and asked me wouldn't I come in and watch the dancing. I said I had watched it through the window, but my feet was kind of aching and I would rest them on the porch rail for a bit.

"I won't forget you when the refreshments are served," Sadie said.

"You better not, unless you want me bustin' in there on the jump," says I.

We talked of this and that for a while, the way folks do at parties, and then Sadie went inside. Pretty soon a couple of them city lads come out to smoke a cigarette apiece, and we had a little chat. I must say they was nice boys; they didn't put on no airs with me. Mebbe they thought I was a business man from the city and was just visiting at Sadie's.

After them come a couple of the strange girls, and, by golly, one of them smoked a cigarette right out in the open. She was a red haired, bob haired girl, and at first I didn't think much of her; she made me think of a boy more'n of a girl. But before she went in, after she had finished the cigarette, she had laughs bubbling out of me; I was fair choked, them laughs come so fast. She was all right, that girl, in spite of some drawbacks. All folks has *some* drawbacks.

For a time I was alone and I begun to wonder where Jimmie was. I didn't have time to wonder long, for pretty soon his car drew up out front and he piled out of it. He come up the front steps as straight as a soldier boy. I seen there was a kind of a hot look in his face, and I knowed then that he had fought against coming to the

party but didn't have the stamina to carry the fight to a finish. He spied me, and come over to me and shook hands with me very grave, notwithstanding I had lately spent about all my time with him.

"Some doings," he said, and his lips curled.

"Why, it's a right nice party, Jimmie," says I. "It's too bad you don't dance."

"Me?" he snaps. "Why, I shake one of the wickedest legs you ever saw."

"Whyn't you do it, then?" says I. "You go in and grab off that red haired, bob haired girl. She's got vim, that girl. You'll like her."

"Pretty?" he says.

"Homely," says I. "But—well, there is something about her."

A slow grin come to his lips, and he narrows his eyes. I could see that he was figuring on a stunt. He gets up and tosses his hat on a chair. Then the door is opened and a bunch of the boys and girls comes out to take the air. Sadie is with them, and she catches a glimpse of her one and only love. I expected they would shoot a look at each other, each trying to be haughtier than the other. But Sadie's eyes glimmers like pools of deep water with sunlight on them.

She comes over to Jimmie with her hand stuck out. He kept his hands at his sides, but she snatches up one of them and turns around to the gang. She introduces Jimmie to the strangers like he was the only real man yet produced by the human race, and Jimmie bowed right and left and shook hands and was real nice about it, though I was sure he didn't feel that way.

The redhead is a little in advance of the others, and when the introducing is done Jimmie walks over to her, slow and grave, and gives her a bow with his hand on the lower part of his chest.

"May I have the next dance?" he asks.

"Make a bet on it and win some loose change," says Redhead.

The phonograph begun hitting on high just then, and they all flocked into the room, the redhead hooking her hand into the crook of Jimmie's arm. Well, they not only danced that dance, but they danced the next two, as I could see when I took my feet off the rail and happened to look through the window.

At the end of their third dance Sadie comes out on the porch. She goes to the rail and stands there, looking up at the sky.

"The stars is real nice to-night, Sadie," says I.

I seen her take in her breath long and slow and let go of it in the same manner. She was still staring up at the stars.

"Are they?" she says.

She stood there till the gang comes out again for another breath of air, mixed with a good deal of cigarette smoke. The redhead and Jimmie is standing together, one of them talking all the time and sometimes both of them talking at the same time. Jimmie has his hands in his coat pockets, and he is leaning down to the slim girl while she has her eyes lifted to his face. Once in a while Jimmie teeters up on his toes and back again to the flat of his feet in a mighty contented kind of way.

Jennie gives them a few minutes and then she comes in with the phonograph. I can see that that black girl is tickled all over by the music. The only thing she did not like about this party was the intermissions.

Well, the gang starts to troop back like they thought they might miss a step or two in the dance. Jimmie and Redhead start for the door.

Sadie steps up to them.

"Miss Byerly," she says as sweet as sugar, "would you mind surrendering my husband to me for this one dance? Do you know that I wasn't aware till this evening that he could dance! I'd like to take advantage of my discovery. Then you can have him for the rest of the evening. I shall be busy with the refreshments."

"Go to it, kid, and make him step," says Redhead.

Jimmie stuck out his elbow and Sadie put her hand in the crook of it. Redhead perches herself on the rail and lights a cigarette.

"I think I started something," says she. "Those two have been having a fuss, or I don't know the symptoms. That dance

ought to get them. He's a heavenly dancer."

I turned around to look through the window, and Redhead comes and sits on the arm of my chair so she can see better. Golly, I blushed, but I forgot it in a minute while I watched Sadie and Jimmie. Jimmie could dance all right, and Sadie was like thistledown. Sadie kept looking up at him with a smile on her lips, but he just looked over her head. When the music stopped he let go of her like he thought she might snap at him. As he drew back Sadie let her hand run down his arm and when their hands touched she give his hand a squeeze. I could see the blood sweep up into his face, and he fairly run to the front door.

Redhead, on the arm of my chair, giggled.

Jimmie come out on the porch and did his little bit in astronomy and then the lunch was served. Me and Redhead had a table between us, but she wouldn't take the seat opposite me; she just sat on the arm of the chair and nibbled and giggled. Every once in a while she would put her spoon to my mouth and make me take a spoonful of her food. If I was of a bashful nature, she certainly would have got my goat.

Well, all parties ends in time, if time holds out, and so did this. Jennie closed up the phonograph and kind of one-stepped to the kitchen, and Jimmie and Sadie stood on the top step, apart from each other, and said good-by to everybody, and Redhead asked me to take her down to the car, and I did and put her into it, and she leaned down and give me a kiss on the cheek and told me I was "delicious," and everybody hollered at me and yelled "Good night, Mr. Tom Hill," and I got away from there and was glad to get up in the cool and dark of my front porch.

"One thing," says I to myself: "Sadie and Jimmie are under their own roof tree together anyhow. They will either kiss and make up or they will have a knock down and drag out scrap that will be another wonder in the world. That redhead has started humpin' things in one direction or another. I hope it is the right direction, for she is a nice, smart little girl. Well, I will sit here a while and see what turns up."

CHAPTER IX.

ODDS AND ENDS.

IT'S dog-gone funny but every time I get my shoes off and h'ist my sock feet to the rail of my porch I begin to drowse. I done it this time, same as usual, and when I come to with a start I thought something had busted loose. My feet come down so hard I hurt one of my corns and that brought me wide awake. For a minute there was silence and then there was a blast from an auto horn. I went to the end of the porch and looked down the road.

I seen Jimmie's auto leave the curb and come out into the middle of the street. There it stopped for a minute and then it started toward my house.

"Golly," says I to myself, "it's all off. They have had their scrap, and Jimmie is leaving. Mebbe he will come here. Well, it is too bad they couldn't have made up. Here is Jimmie with a growing business on his hands, and Sadie comes home from her fly-away vacation, and everything, and now it is all off, definite and complete."

I slipped into my shoes and went down to the curb, so's I could hail Jimmie if he didn't stop. I looked up the road toward the auto, and then I give a gasp. That car was zigzaggin' from one side of the road to the other. The only reason it didn't climb the curb was because it was moving so slow.

"Golly!" says I. "Is it possible that Jimmie has been hitting a bottle on the sly and the licker is just mounting up on him? Or has he lost all sense of direction?"

I stood there sort of spellbound. The car kept coming toward me after its own fashion. First it was on one side of the road, then on the other. When it come near me I jumped back. I wasn't real sure but that it would decide to do its curb climbing right in front of my house, and I was for safety first.

The car went clean across the street and then it swerved and dashed toward my

horse block. I give a yell of warning and was answered by a laugh. As the car was within five feet of the horse block it turned aside, rolled up to the block, and stopped. I looked into the car, and then I laughed, too. Jimmie and Sadie was sitting in the front seat. Sadie was at the wheel and Jimmie had an arm slid across the back of the seat. The arm was kind of cuddled up against Sadie's shoulders.

"How's that, Mr. Tom Hill?" Sadie says; and I see that her eyes was brighter than ever and her cheeks—golly, they would have made a rose wonder why so many pomes had been wrote to roses. I never seen joy flaming in cheeks like that before.

"Do you think I will ever learn to run this boat, Mr. Tom Hill?" Sadie goes on. "Jimmie insisted on giving me a lesson this late at night. He says it's my car. Isn't that just fine, Mr. Tom Hill? And isn't it just glorious that Jimmie has started in a big business for himself? Why, he will soon run 'Lije out into the street. It's just what I have been hoping he would do. The idea of a man with his business ability and knowing as much about the grocery trade as he does being just a clerk for 'Lije. Wasn't it perfectly ridiculous, Mr. Tom Hill? Don't you think this is a lovely car?

"Wasn't my party just fine? I'm going to give one every month from now on. Wasn't it dandy that Jimmie got home when he did, so we could dance together? Will you come to all my parties, Mr. Tom Hill? You looked just splendid to-night. You made a big hit with everybody, especially Miss Byerly. Why don't you get married, Mr. Tom Hill? You're not an old man yet, by any means. Jimmie told me how you helped him to get started in his business. You are going to help him all you can, aren't you, Mr. Tom Hill? You have so many friends. You will speak a good word for the store, won't you, Mr. Tom Hill?"

It was some barrage she was layin' down, believe me, and finally I yelled "Whoa!" and she let up so I could get in a word edgeways.

"Yes," says I—"yes to all your questions, though I don't remember now what they all was. Anything you ask me to do, however, I will do. I've always been for you, Sadie, and I'm for you stronger than ever now. As for Jimmie and me going round together, why, there was some fun in that. Jimmie—"

"I thought I heard something knocking in that engine, Tom," Jimmie interrupts. "Have you got a monkey wrench, Mr. Tom Hill?"

"Why, two-three out to the barn," I says. "But—"

"Lend me one for just a minute," Jimmie says; and he jumped out of the car with a flash light in his hand. "Just a minute, honey, and we will continue your lesson," he says to Sadie.

We went out to the barn, but as I had expected, Jimmie didn't ask me to hunt for no monkey wrench. He laid a hand on my arm and fairly hissed into my ear:

"For the love of Mike, Tom, don't go telling Sadie anything about what you and I have been doing in the last few days. She must never know about my gambling with Ike and smoking my head off and walloping Billy, and all that stuff. Billy is going to make a pretty good clerk, I think, and I don't want to make any trouble for him. I don't want my wife to think I am a roughneck."

I pretended to cough and turned my head over my shoulder polite, as it'd seem, but really so Jimmie wouldn't see the smile that jumped to my lips before I could stop it. If Sadie didn't know about his doings already, I was a poor guesser.

"Why," I says when I got through coughing, "I'm mum. You mustn't tell Sadie I let you gamble neither. It would look bad, me being an officer of the law."

"Your hand on it, Mr. Tom Hill," he says, and we gripped in the dark of my driveway.

"Where's the wrench?" Sadie says when we come back, and I knowed she was smiling, though I didn't dare look at her.

"Just let me start the engine and I'll listen for that knock," Jimmie says; and he started the engine, and said he guessed there wasn't no knock after all.

Then he got into the car and Sadie started it on its zigzag way again. They went up and down the street for nearly an hour,

and, smart girl that she was, Sadie steered a fairly straight course the last time, and the car run up into their drive and out to the back of the house. I watched till the lights blinked off. Then I went to bed. Golly, I should think so! It had been a larger night than usual for me.

And now just a few odds and ends. I was in the store next day at noontime, and in comes Sadie. She has on a perky gingham dress, made very fashionable, and she unrolls a long apron from a bundle and ties it on.

"Jennie has your lunch ready, Jimmie," she says, snappy. "You go up and get it and I'll mind the store. Take an hour. Lie down for a while after you eat. You have been eating too fast and working right afterward. That's bad for your digestion."

"I'm not going to let you make a clerk out of yourself," Jimmie objects.

"Run along and do what I tell you," Sadie says. "I'm not going to have you run up a doctor's bill."

So Jimmie run along. Sadie come over to me and held out her hand. I seen a ring with a green stone set in kind of dull gold, prettiest ring I'd seen in a long time.

"Present?" says I.

"From Jimmie," she says. "For my birthday."

"Well, here," says I, "you had a birthday just a little while ago. How many birthdays do you have in a year? It's not two months since Jimmie give you the wash—"

"This ring is for the same birthday," she says. "It's a little late, but very acceptable, nevertheless."

"Oh!" says I, real eloquent.

Jimmie and Billy's father has a long conference in the back of the store a little later, Jimmie having sent Billy to the city on some kind of an errand or another. Next day Billy's father comes for him in a big car.

"He's going into his father's office in the city," Jimmie says. "Not a bad fellow. Just thoughtless. Learned his lesson, I think."

I met Elizabeth on the street the next day after that. She stopped and stood looking at me with a stony stare.

"What a fool you are, Hill!" she says. "You are not a detective. You are an idiot."

"Who ever said I was a detective?" I asked her.

"Nobody!" she flares. "Nobody would dare."

"Well, then," says I, calm and pleasant.

She started away; turned back.

"I hear you were at that—at her party," she says.

"I was," said I, "and I had a splendid time. Why wasn't you there, Elizabeth?"

I declare her face got kind of red and she bit her lip to keep it from shaking.

"I'm a lonely old woman," she said. "I'm not good enough, not gay enough, for the rising generation. I wasn't invited."

Then she did go away from there. Well, I waited till Sadie showed up at the store at noon and then I read her the riot act.

"But I thought she would be insulted," Sadie said. "Do you think she would come next time?"

"Try her," says I.

Sadie tried her. Elizabeth didn't accept that bid, nor the next five. On the seventh she come, and me and her sat on the porch and talked and ate ices and cake. Elizabeth kind of unbent. At least I think she did. I dunno. I was thinking of that red headed Byerly girl. I was wondering if she would be back at the beach the next summer. I hoped so. She was a very int'resting young lady.

THE END

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THE MAN IN THE DARK

a short story of dramatic intensity by MAX BRAND, will be one of the features of our issue of next week.



Minions of the Law

By HORACE HOWARD HERR

Author of "The Turquoise Arrow," "The Carbon Copy," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

RED BRONSON, horse wrangler, who becomes deputy when his old friend Rip Jaimson takes office as United States marshal in Winslow, Arizona, tells the story. Jim Barber, a cowman rumored to have been East at college, knocks Warrenship, owner of the Palace of Pleasure, saloon and gambling house, over a poker table when Warrenship is nasty to the "Princess," a new and "different" girl who plays the piano in the house. Warrenship tries to draw, and Jim shoots him in the shoulder. The Princess then reveals that Warrenship is her brother. Tuey, a bad man who is an admirer of the Princess, makes covert threats against Barber. Two strangers, a tall man and his short friend, drift into town and inquire for Tuey. That same night the strangers hold up the Palace of Pleasure and some one shoots Rip Jaimson in the neck. The Princess volunteers to act as Jaimson's nurse, and Red prepares to do some detective work.

CHAPTER III *(continued)*.

A DEPUTY NEGLECTS HIS DUTY.

I MEANDERED across the flat to Barnitt's and left my shopping list there to be taken care of, and then I went over to the Palace of Pleasure to see if Speedy had come on shift. He was there, just taking the blanket off of the roulette table. The one thing which Speedy isn't, is serious. However, there wasn't a joke in his system as he asked:

"How's Rip this morning?"

It didn't take me long to tell him all I knew about Rip's condition, being careful to say nothing of the complication that I had left in the 'dobe with him, and then I started out to gather some information.

"When did you last see Jim Barber?" I asked.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 8.

"Didn't see him last night. Understand he beat it for Sunset about midnight."

"Liquored up?"

"Understand he was as talkative as one of those skulls they're diggin' up in the cliff dweller towns over near Flagstaff," Speedy said. "Reckon Sad-eye could tell you more about 'im than I can. He saw 'im when he was draggin' it for Sunset."

"When did he pull out?"

"Just after midnight, I reckon. I went over to the Chink's about that time for chow and on my way back I tried to avoid a collision with Sad-eye, but the road wasn't wide enough. He told me then that Jim had pulled out for the range. Being in a hurry to get away from Sad-eye, I got back in time to play the sucker in a sure thing game. I'm feelin' as poor as a government Injun this morning."

"What did they take?"

"Nothing much, but everything that was in sight," Speedy said in that drawl of his. "They did leave me my working tools, but those 'leven hundred dollars that decorated the tables are now in damned bad company."

"Would you know them if you saw them again?"

"What ju mean, the money?"

"No, the two men that had you reaching for the ceiling."

"Would I know them? Naw, I wouldn't know them. Might of if I had had a good look at them, but everywhere I looked I was looking into a barrel. I sure was! I didn't see any men; all I saw was the business end of a gun with its mouth open so wide that I could see down its throat where that lead slug was—"

"Was Tuey in here most of the evening after Jim Barber put his brand on Warrenship?"

"Yes, that cheap tin horn was hanging round here all evening until just before I went after my grub. He bought a dollar's worth of chips and just because I wanted to take them away from him on one roll, he cashed in for seventy-five dollars. However, guess he might as well had 'em as the other—er—well, you know what I mean."

"Yes," I grinned, "me being a minion of the law, I ain't supposed to consider a fellow as guilty until the evidence is in, but you, seeing as how you're nothing but a gambler by profession, you can tell the truth about any one you want to and get away with it."

"Well, Red, I'll lay the cards down for you. I'm fond of this Tuey fellow just like I'm fond of a Gila monster. He's done me no dirt, understand. I've got nothing on him, but just sizing him up on general markings, if you're looking for some one that ought to make an ideal prisoner in an air tight pen, I'd recommend Tuey."

"Got to give him credit, Speedy," I said, even though it hurt me to say something good about him, "he acted pretty white last night. Helped me get Rip back to the 'dobe and then remained there all night with me—and he really helped, too."

"Well, good-by, Red!" Speedy drawled. "Hate to lose you. I sure will miss your regular contributions to the rent money, but when Tuey's being good to you I reckon it's time to bid you a long farewell. Say, if that coyote ever starts to being nice to me I'll buy one of those new six-guns and get a second set of eyes for the back of my head. Take the advice of the best little roulette dealer on this stretch of sand, Red. When you are going, sort of keep an eye on where you're coming, and when you're coming, be sure to watch where you're going. You sure want to have the red and black covered, with a little something on the green just to keep the goose eggs from winning the money. That's me, Red, when I'm playing the game with that *hombre!*"

"Seen Rube Howell this morning?"

"Oh, yes, he drifted in for his morning's morning a few minutes ago. If that kid would put more in his paper and less down his throat, he'd get on faster. Perfectly good boy, but sometimes I think he lacks something."

"Lacks experience," I suggested.

"Naw," Speedy dissented in that drawl of his, "it's mostly brains he lacks!"

"Hope he's got enough of them to tell me what was on his mind last night when he called Rip Jaimson out of Squire Glynn's place. He and Rip went off toward 'dobe town together and the next thing I knew

Rip had been drilled through the neck and the kid had disappeared—"

"Why, he showed up with the gang and wanted to join them when they pulled out of here on the man hunt, but the boys wouldn't let him go along."

"Well, this is once that the newspaper fellow gets interviewed, because I want to talk with that lad, and not for publication, either."

With that I meandered over to the cigar box that served as an office for the *Weekly Squeal*. Rube was decorating the peak of a high stool, and was picking those types out of their pens as if his life depended on it. When he saw that a minion of the law had called on him, he climbed down from his perch, got a big sheet of paper and a stubby pencil, eased up to a soap box that served as his desk, and said:

"Mr. Bronson, as the deputy marshal, what have you to say about this unfortunate incident?"

I took a second look at him to be sure that he wasn't trying to make a fool of me, which couldn't be done since nature can't be improved upon, and seeing that he was reasonably sober and in earnest, I replied:

"Nothing, and a lot of it. In the first place there's no occasion for you being sarcastic that way, and calling me mister. My name's Red Bronson and that's perfectly good enough for yours truly. In the next place, as the deputy marshal, I want to know what happened when you called Rip Jaimson out of Squire Glynn's office last night."

The kid got red in the face and seemed as uncertain what to do as a cheap gambler with one chip when there's thirty-six numbers and the single and double O to cover.

"You understand I might get into serious trouble if I talked," he finally managed to say.

"I understand that you can get into serious trouble if you don't talk," I said. "Looks to me as if you have your rope on some information which I need, and I want you to put the cards on the table where I can look them over."

"Here," said the kid as he picked up a long tray, on which was a string of those types, "I'll give you a proof of the story I've set up for the paper."

He smeared some ink on the types and put a sheet of paper over them and then using a wooden block and a mallet, he got the reading matter onto the paper and handed it to me. I took the paper and sought a place to sit down, the which I have to do when I read. Seems like I picked a bad place, although I didn't see anything on the low bench where I deposited myself. Just as I sat, the kid let out a yell:

"Look out for those galleys!"

I felt something sort of give way where I was sitting, so I jumped up and discovered that I had plunked myself down on three of those long trays and those types had all fallen over. The kid's face looked as if he had received bad news from home.

"Now what?" I asked.

"You've pied the whole works!" he exclaimed. "The paper won't get out this week."

"*Komo!*" I says. "Me no savvy that pied."

"You've mixed up all the type I had set for this week's issue. It will take me another day to reset that matter and I wanted to get out with the paper this afternoon with the big story."

"Don't cry about it, Rube," I urged him, "I'll help you set 'em on their feet again and maybe you'll get—"

"You'll help me!" he exclaimed in disgust. "What do you know about setting type?"

Well, Rube was mighty discouraged, I could see that. The future looked pretty cloudy for him and he asked me sort of peevish like if I would mind going outside and using the edge of the water trough when I sat down again. It took some time for me to read that story while I was standing up, but finally I got to the end of it.

"That's a perfectly good story about our popular United States marshal being criminally and viciously insulted by unknown assailments, and being shot in 'dobe town, but it don't tell anything new. What I want to know, Rube, is just this: What did you tell Rip Jaimson when you called him out of Squire Glynn's place?"

"I haven't any proof to substantiate my statements," Rube protested. "It would just be my word against some one else's."

"But, look here, Rube, you come into Glynn's place and ask Rip to step outside with you. He steps, and the two of you walk away in the dark toward 'dobe town and the next thing we know, some one has drilled Rip Jaimson through the neck. That looks bad for you, young fellow, bad enough to warrant me putting you in the hoosegow. In a case like this no one is above suspicion, myself inclusive. Rip's laid out for six weeks and it's up to me to round up the centipedes who turned this trick."

"If I tell you what I told Rip, will you keep it to yourself?"

"I'm not in the habit of spilling confidential information."

"Well, last night, about a half hour before I found Rip at Glynn's place, I was standing by that big post in front of Criswell's corral and three men came round the corner from the direction of Warrenship's house. One of them was talking in a low tone, but you could tell that he was pretty sore about something. Near as I could make out he was accusing one of the trio of neglecting to do his part in some undertaking, because of a skirt. He said something about the pay for the railroad construction gang having arrived in Holbrook a week ago, and as near as I could make out he said: 'Instead of keepin' us posted you've been in here lickin' up hard liquor and shinin' up to this here woman.'"

"One of them a tall fellow?" I interrupted.

"Yes, Mr. Bronson—"

"Just drop that mister, it makes me nervous like as if you were going to present a bill, er something!"

"When they passed between me and the light in the Palace of Pleasure, I saw that one of them was unusually tall and one of them was a very small fellow and the third one, who was walking between the other two, was—"

The young fellow stopped and looked at me as if he didn't know whether I was just bluffing or held the cards.

"Maybe," I said by way of helping him along, "the third fellow was Tuey."

"I was going to say, Mr.—er—Red, that the light was rather bad and, maybe, I had a drink or two more than I needed, but the third fellow did look like Tuey a little, and when he told the tall fellow to just forget about the woman because she wasn't any business of his, I thought the voice sounded like Tuey's."

"All right, Rube, for the present we'll give him the benefit of the doubt; maybe it was Tuey and maybe it wasn't. What next?"

"Well, they crossed the street and stood at the end of Barnitt's loading platform for several minutes and while I couldn't hear all they said, I heard one of them say that it would be another month before the money for the pay roll of the construction gang would be sent out again.

"Right after that I heard a funny, rasping voice say something about driving a bunch over the Big Rim just to keep their hands in, and then the voice that sounded like Tuey's said something about Jim Barber and his holding a big bunch of steers near Sunset Pass. I couldn't hear all they said, but this fellow ended up by saying: 'And if you plug him for good, so much the better.'"

"And that's what you told Rip last night?"

"Yes, Mr. Red, and as they moved away I heard the tall fellow say something about spotting 'this Barber *hombre* before he drags it,' and the peculiar voice broke in with the suggestion that 'maybe this maverick might have some spare change in his pocket.' Just as they got out of hearing from me, the fellow who may have been Tuey was warning the other two that Barber was quick on the draw. I think the three of them were laughing when they went around the corner of the trading store, heading for Long Horn saloon."

"And what did you do?" I asked.

"Went looking for Barber. I had seen him in the Monarch just a few minutes before, but when I got down there they said he had just started toward 'dobe town, intending to get his horse and hit the trail. I didn't know what to do, so I hunted up Mr. Jaimson and told him and he thought it might be well for him to drift over into

'dobe town and see if he could find Jim Barber before he got away."

"And when you got over there, some one potted my boss."

"You understand, I wasn't with him when he was shot. When we got as far as the Mexican store, he insisted that I remain there until he came back. I had been there about five minutes when I heard two shots and then I ran down toward the old windbreak near Mexican Tony's corral where Barber generally keeps his horse, and I found Mr. Jaimson unconscious on the ground."

"How come you didn't get the news to the Palace of Pleasure?" I asked, remembering very well that it was Tuey who brought the report to us.

"The Monarch was closer. I went there."

"Looks rather messy, doesn't it, kid?"

"Yes, and I don't want to mix in on it. I'm just running a newspaper and—"

"I know newspaper persons are very timid about mixing in on other people's business," I admitted, "but this time you keep your mouth shut like as if you had the lockjaw and I'll eat that funny kind of pie you got there if I don't give you a real story for that *Weekly Squeal* of yours."

CHAPTER IV.

COMPLICATIONS DEVELOP.

WHEN I got back to Barnitt's trading store they had enough grub stacked up for me that it made me think of the days when I used to buy the rations for the chuck wagon for the Williamson outfit. You couldn't have put that load on a pack mule with a diamond hitch, and yet I managed to get under it and waddle out of the store. Every step I took my legs, the which are considerably bowed out as the result of using them to cling to range horses what don't much prefer to be clung to, seemed to give considerably and by the time I got to our adobe I didn't know for sure whether I was walking on my ankles or the outside of my knees.

If Rube Howell hadn't given me something to think about, I found more than enough when I got back to my mud domicile. Tuey met me at the door. The very sight of him made my red mane stand right up on end. All that saved him from some serious conversation at that moment was the fact that I didn't want to disturb my boss, Rip Jaimson, and the additional fact that I knew I was going to be mashed flat as a pancake if I didn't then and there get out from under some of those foods which had been ordered for a sick man. I didn't back away when Tuey offered to take some of the bundles.

As soon as I could see over the top of the load, I looked toward the cot where my boss was stretched out. I heard a dozen eggs hit the floor, making a sound like an omelet, but I paid no attention to them. There was my boss, Rip Jaimson, the which used to be as shy of a woman as a range horse is of a saddle, his head resting on a pillow that looked as white and as cool as the snows on the peak of Frisco Mountain, his eyes closed and an expression on his face that made me think he was dreaming of a straight flush in a ceiling limit game or a million dollars in gold. Beside his cot sat the Princess. With her left hand she was fanning Rip with his sombrero, while her right hand rested lightly on his forehead.

If I had been in my natural element instead of being a minion of the law, I would have bet a feed bag full of five dollar gold pieces against a hatful of sand that Rip Jaimson's case had been complicated by heart trouble. Just for a second or two I stood there and thought how pleasant it would be to be shot through the neck. Then Tuey returned from the kitchen and I decided that I wouldn't be shot in the neck, or any place else, if it meant that that coyote was to be sneaking around the shack while I was convoluting, or whatever it is that you do when you are getting well.

I went on into the kitchen, because our biggest and best room seemed mighty crowded when Tuey and I were in it, and by the time I had unloaded the rest of the grub, the Princess joined me and we set about getting a late breakfast for ourselves and a little something in liquid form for my boss.

Considering the fact that it was the first time I ever found myself in the kitchen with a woman, I got along fairly well, doing nothing impolite, but stirring cornmeal with my fingers when it was bubbling hot, the which made me use some of my corral Latin. After the Princess had put some soda on my burned fingers, she told me to clear out, and I removed myself to the other room. I wanted to talk to Sandy Tuey, but I didn't want to disturb my boss and it looked as if we had complications enough in that mud house without my precipitating any new unpleasantness, the which doesn't mean that it would have been unpleasant for me to talk to Tuey if I were where I could use my fists and my boots if necessary. I sat down beside Rip Jaimson's cot and tried to make sense of the information I didn't have.

The cards in sight were about after this fashion: Tuey blows into town. No one knows for sure whether he is coming or going. He sees this filly in Warrenship's place and begins to think about getting his brand on her. Comes one Jim Barber with an ear for music and an eye for this sort of a woman. One woman and two men; mix them in the right proportions and, I reckon, quite some sizable spell of hot weather is on the calendar—maybe not as hot as if you had mixed two women and one man, but almost.

Then comes two strange *hombres* looking for Tuey. They are carrying their visible means of support at their belts and, according to Rube, they are using the spurs on Tuey because he has wandered off his range. Mix in to that a reference to Barber, a word or two about the pay roll for the railroad construction gang, and a remark about driving a bunch over the rim and what could minions of the law make of it all when the boss minion, the which has the brains that go with the office, is flat on his back with a bullet hole through his neck. I had just about concluded to give Tuey the benefit of the doubt, the which Squire Glynn says is according to the law, and throw him into jail, when the Princess came in with a cup of broth for Rip.

We propped the old boy up on the pillow, me being helpful by holding the cup. Tuey offered to help, but the Princess wouldn't have it any other way than that she should raise Rip's head and fix the pillow under it. When she had him tucked up just so, she took the cup of broth and began to feed him with a spoon.

Whoever would have thought that Rip Jaimson would have come to that! When I saw how helpless he was I made up my mind that Tuey wasn't going to stand there and see my boss in his humiliation. I walked over to the door and gave Tuey a nod, the which invited him outside, and when he had accepted the invitation I said:

"We're certainly obliged to you for helping us out, but it isn't right to keep you from your business and we'll be able to manage now."

He looked at me and I looked at him and then his eyes sort of shifted and he said:

"*Bueno, amigo.* I'll drag it. In the meantime, if you need any help just let me know."

"Thanks," I said. "When I want you I'll let you know."

Again Tuey looked at me and I looked at him and I still was looking at him when he turned and started across the flat toward the business district, the which wasn't much to boast of, maybe, and yet it was a pretty good business district for the size of it. Having some curiosity about Tuey's real business even though he wore high heeled boots and talked the *habla* of a cow-puncher, I wanted to see which business would draw him. He went across the flat straight to Barnitt's corner and turned up the side street. There was just one business in the side street—it was Warrenship's Palace of Pleasure.

"Come on, Mr. Bronson, let us have some breakfast."

Those were kind words, but they made me nervous. The idea of an old range lizard like me sitting down to a table with a woman like her! I was shaking so, when I went into the 'dobe, that my knees were hitting together, and when a bow legged horse wrangler's knees hit together it's a sign that he is considerably nervous.

I didn't have much appetite for anything but watching the Princess as she dished up

the chow. Her face had a pretty flush on it. Her eyes had a pretty twinkle in them. Her lips had a pretty smile on them and, taken all in all, and admitting that I'm a better judge of horse flesh than I am of women, I'd say that she was just about the prettiest woman I had ever seen—too pretty, I kept thinking, to be hanging around a place like Warrenship's.

"Are you hungry?" she asked as she dished up a bowl of steaming cornmeal mush and put it in front of me.

"No, ma'am," I replied, "my appetite's sort a busted out of its corral."

"It's just as well," she says, "because I'm not much of a cook."

"Reckon you're good enough for me," I said, that coming as near something gallant as I could think of on the spur of the moment. As soon as I had said it I decided it didn't sound like it ought to, so I tried to fix it up.

"I mean it don't take much of a cook for me. I've been eating sand and sagebrush mixed up with beans and bacon so long that I don't suppose I'll appreciate home cooking."

By that time it began to dawn on me that it might be better to let her do the talking, which I did and became so interested that I didn't notice I had put away two bowls of mush, eight flapjacks, two fried eggs, several strips of bacon, and was on my third cup of Java when I came to, the coming to part of it being about like this:

Everybody present, myself inclusive, was having a perfectly delightful time, when all of a sudden those twinkling eyes of hers lost their fire and sort of dulled with an anxious expression.

"Mr. Bronson," she said, "may I ask you a rather direct question?"

Well, I'd have told her the story of my past and misspent life if she'd ask me in that tone of voice; so I told her to go ahead and shoot.

"Do you think Mr. Tuey had anything to do with—well, with Mr. Jaimson's accident?"

"First place, Princess, it wasn't an accident," I told her. "Whoever drilled Rip through the neck meant to do it. In the next place, I was over in Squire Glynn's place when the shooting was done, and by the time I got over here there wasn't much evidence against any one. If Rip can't tell us something about it when he gets to where he can talk, we're going to be up against it for a likely clew."

"You're not talking like you think," she said, smiling across the narrow table which seemed to get narrower the more she smiled. "I'm afraid you haven't much faith in women, Mr. Bronson."

"Well, Princess, there was a time when my favorite source of edification was games of skill, and the last game I got precipitated into was a ceiling limit play at the old Monarch; and I would have walked out of that dump that night with seventeen hundred dollars if I hadn't put my faith in a queen. I already had three of them, and I thought I had a date to meet the fourth one, but the old girl didn't show up. Maybe I've got good reasons for not having faith in women."

"Very well," she says, laughing at me over the narrowest table that ever separated a man from a pretty woman, "I have some faith in some men, and I just want to whisper to you that the one man in this town I wouldn't trust is Tuey."

"Do you feel that way about it?" I asked, choking down the impulse to slap her on the back, the which I knew wasn't quite the thing to do with a woman even though she'd said something that had taken a big load off your soul, assuming for the sake of argument that an ex-horse-wrangler and a minion of the law has a soul.

"I'm sure I am not wrong, Mr. Bronson."

"And while I don't know much about Tuey, and don't want to know any more, I'd be willing to gamble my old hoss, Napoleon, against a Navaho goat, the which is my idea of nothing for a white man to own, that you are right."

"I just wanted to be sure that you were watching him, Mr. Bronson."

"But he's a friend of your brother," I said; and before the words were out of my mouth I wished that some rip-snortin' maverick had knocked them down my throat and all my teeth along with them.

The Princess winced as if I had struck her in the face. She turned red and would not look at me, and all I could do was to sit there and think cuss words and call myself names.

"So you know," she said, after what seemed to me about seven years of silence. "And does he know?" she asked nodding her head toward the next room.

"Princess, I'm nothing but an old desert cactus with a red head. I've stepped in a gopher hole and said something that I didn't want to say. And now what I want to say I don't know how to say. Yes, I know because I heard you tell Jim Barber last night, and Rip Jaimson knows because he's been watching you ever since you came to this range; and, too, I and Rip being two stirrups to the same saddle and something closer than brothers, and not quite as close as twins, he knows everything that I do.

"And, Princess, the more we know, the more we want to be your friends. That's all the cards, and seein' as how I'm giving you a look at my hand, I wish you would not call me Mr. Bronson any more. Can't you just make it Red, like Rip does, and let it go at that?"

That oration made me dizzy, and I thought I was going to take a header off the soap box I was using as a chair before she spoke again.

"He is not a friend of my brother, and I think you realize it," she said, shying at the question I had asked her. "He pretends to be, and my brother doesn't see through him. It is the man's pretended friendship for my brother that makes me afraid, and, Red, I'm— Look out, you're spilling your coffee!"

Being reminded sudden like that way that my coffee was pouring over the wrong side of my saucer, I dropped the saucer, and by the time law and order had been restored I didn't have the nerve to go back to a subject which I was convinced she could not discuss without pain to herself. While I tried to help her do up the dishes we talked mostly about Rip Jaimson, the which is a subject I can talk about, and maybe we'd have put in the rest of the day on that interesting and informing subject if Doc Sandow hadn't made his second call and rudely pulled me out of the clouds.

Well, Doc went over his patient again, and insisted that he was doing as well as could be expected.

"Any signs of complications?" I asked.

"None," says Doc; which made me wonder what was wrong with his eyesight. "Rip's got a wonderful constitution, and he's going to pull through in a hurry. He must not talk for a couple of days. Don't try to say a word. Just let the muscles of that throat relax and rest. I'll have you out of bed in a week, and six weeks from now you'll be ready to get shot again."

After Doc had gone the Princess sat down beside Rip's cot and again began to fan him with the sombrero. I sat down on the case of canned corn, and soon was so lost in the contemplation of a pleasant picture that I fell off and landed more or less in a cluster on the dirt floor.

"You poor man!" the Princess exclaimed in a low voice as I picked myself up and wondered how on earth I could have gone to sleep so quickly. "You're dead for sleep. Why don't you get some rest while I'm here?"

"When there's a strange woman in the house," I said, "a minion of the law ought to keep his eyes open."

She laughed at that and went over to my cot and smoothed out the blanket. "Please get a little rest. You know you'll have to be awake all night."

I went into the kitchen and removed my boots and hung my belt and Old Betsy on the peg near the kitchen door, and then I flopped on my old cot and in less than a minute I was riding old Napoleon across the desert, hell-bent for election, following a couple of men, the which should have been in a circus because one of them was twelve feet tall and the other one was so small that he looked no bigger than a horse-fly perched on the apex of his cayuse. I did not seem to gain much on the two, but, having a lot of faith in my hoss, Napoleon, I believe I might have caught up with those two freaks if the Princess hadn't awakened me before the race was over.

"Goodness," says the Princess, "you surely sleep soundly."

"And you snore like as if you was wind-broke."

That remark made me sit right up on my little cot. There was Tuey, leaning against the sill of the door leading into the kitchen. On his face was a nasty smile, the which was the only kind of a smile I ever saw on his face. I think the Princess saw that I wasn't just exactly happy on finding Tuey in the house, and maybe she realized that I was going to order him to get out and stay out, because before I could say anything she said:

"It's five o'clock. You've been asleep six hours. It's time for me to go home. I've fixed up a little supper for you, and it's all ready on the table. Mr. Tuey 'll walk home with me, and I'll be over again in the morning in time to fix up a little something for Mr. Jaimson. If you think you can stand another dose of my cooking I'll get breakfast for you."

Tuey's presence made me tongue-tied. If ever there was a time in my life when I ought to have said something worth while, that was it; but all I could say was:

"Thanks, Princess. Rip and I'll be glad to see you."

She went over to Rip, laid her hand on his forehead, and said:

"I'm so glad you have pulled through, and I know you'll be much better in the morning. Good night."

Tuey moved toward the outer door. There was something suggesting a snarl on his face. Maybe it was because I didn't have my boots on and wasn't just my self, but I was on the verge of putting my hands on Tuey's neck when the Princess turned to me and held out her hand.

"Good night, Red," and then, bending her head just a little so that her lips came near my ear and her silken hair brushed against my cheek, making me feel shivery up and down my spine, she added in a whisper, "Be careful in the dark."

I stood in the doorway and watched Tuey and the Princess until they were across the sand flat. Then I went to the kitchen to find the woman had dished me up a feed that looked like Christmas and Thanksgiving Day had been combined, and while I ate roast pork, and mashed potatoes, and gravy, and dried-apple pie, and coffee, and pickles, and corn fritters, and something that I didn't know the name of, and then another helping of the same, I wondered just what sort of a game Rip Jaimson and I had busted in on, and where, in the course of human events, that wonderful woman was going to land.

It made me sick to think of her beating the ivories on that old piano in Warren-ship's saloon, with every half drunk puncher and sheep herder feeling that he had a perfect right to crowd about her, lay his hands on her, and— Guess that meal was too much for me, because I sure spent a miserable evening in that mud domicile that night.

If the Princess was coming over again in the morning it wouldn't do to let her find the dishes dirty, so I washed them and stowed them in the box cupboard before I went in to sit with Rip. I sat by his cot and fanned him for half an hour before he woke up. When the Princess fanned him he always smiled. When he saw what it was fanning him this time he began to frown and make signs which I took to mean that he wanted a pencil and a piece of paper. That was something to ask for in our mud shack, those being tools I never had to use when I was wrangling horses. After hunting the house over I found the last end of a misspent lead pencil and a piece of wrapping paper, and as I gave them to Rip I had half a notion that he was going to try his hand at writing poetry. Most of them do in the early stages.

But Rip had something else on his mind. When he handed the paper back to me, by reading some of the letters and guessing at the others, I finally decided that he wanted to know if I had seen Barber. I told him I had not.

"Get Barber and bring him in if you have to arrest him," Rip scrawled on the paper.

"But Barber and that Black Opal horse of his are to Sunset Pass by this time," I said.

"Go and get him," Rip wrote.

"Right away?" I asked; and Rip nodded his head.

"No," I protested. "I'm squatting

right here until you are able to take care of yourself. Jim Barber is free born and twenty-one and tolerably quick on the draw, and I reckon he don't need me half as badly as you do. You may be the boss, but all you can do is fire me. I'm not exactly stuck on the prospect of dying of old age, the which being a deputy marshal is a sure preventive for, but I'm going to stick around these diggings until you are on you feet even if sticking spoils my chances of a short life and a merry one."

Again Rip devoted himself to creating literature on a piece of wrapping paper. "I'll take care of myself. You get Barber --quick."

"Rip, if you think I'm going to pull out of here until you are able to get off of that bed and get your boots on, you're plumb locoed."

"You are an officer of the law, and duty comes first. You must go."

When I read that and looked at Rip's face I could see that he had his heart set on me getting in touch with Jim Barber. When he sets his heart on anything, there's no arguing with him.

"All right, Rip Jaimson!" I exclaimed, giving him the Mexican salute with my shoulders. "If you're afraid to take your chances with the Princess when I'm in the field, I reckon you've got the authority to send me out in the desert. You'll break her heart, that's what. She'll come over here in the morning and find this old redhead gone in pursuit of his duty, and you can't tell what the shock 'll do to her; for if I do say it myself, I'm the high card with her right now."

A faint smile came over Rip's face and he wrote on the paper: "I'll boost your game while you're gone."

"But why encourage competition by bringing Barber back here? Give that *hombre* half a chance and he'll cop the bankroll."

"We will have to run that chance because we must have Barber here."

I went to the kitchen and got a low box and put it behind Rip's cot in easy reach of his right hand. Then I took one of his smoke poles and laid it out on the box. He watched me with an amused twinkle in his eye which told me that he thought I was crazy; the which I was, maybe, like a fox.

"Keep your eyes on Tuey," I warned Rip. "He has a stake in this game. First, he's playing for the woman, and after that he's the capper for some sort of a come-on game, the nature of which I haven't figured out. He's very much interested in you, Rip, so watch him like you would a rattlesnake."

With that I beat it across the flat for Criswall's corral, right across the street from the Palace of Pleasure. Seems like my horse, Napoleon, was just about to retire for the night, and he didn't take kindly to having company drop in on him at that hour. We played tag until I got out of wind and then I took my rope and dropped a noose over his head and took a hitch on the snubbing post, intending to choke him down. But the game was over. The minute that rope went over his head he crossed his fingers on me and stood still. I got the saddle and bridle on him, led him over in front of the Palace of Pleasure, dropped the reins on the ground and went inside to see if I could get a word with a friend of mine.

She and Warrenship, the latter with his arm in a sling, were having some sort of an argument, the which wasn't none of my business. When the Princess saw me she left Warrenship and hastened to me.

"How is he?" she asked.

"Better, I reckon. Leastwise he's getting to where you can't argue with him. He's sending me over Sunset way, and I thought you might want to know."

"Is he alone?" she asked rather excitedly.

"Right now, yes; but I'll soon have some one go over and stay with him during the night. I'm going out after Barber, and I may be gone several days."

"After Barber!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; Rip wants him brought in."

She was silent for a minute, and then she laid a hand on my arm and said:

"Please, Red, don't bring Barber in—at least, not until—until Tuey's gone."

I saw Tuey moving toward us from the crowd of loafers, and without another word I turned and walked out of the place.

Just to give Napoleon a chance to show me the new tricks he had thought up during three days of idleness, I let him cut up all the way across the flat to Tony Garcia's 'dobe. Tony was my helper for almost five years, and during that time he learned to do as he was told. I sent him over to our shack and told him to stay there until I returned, and then I turned old Napoleon into the desert, his head pointed toward Sunset Pass, and said, "Here goes nothing."

CHAPTER V.

JIM BARBER ENTERTAINS HIS GUESTS.

THE less said about that sixty miles across the desert, the better. Doing sixty miles, stuck up on old Napoleon's summit, is nothing to remember if a fellow can forget it. Sunup found us at the water hole near the head of Bowlder Arroyo, completely surrounded by dry weather. By noon we were swimming through the sea of heat above Eagle Mesa, and by the time the sun was dipping below the Frisco range we were in the scrub oaks, and poor old Napoleon was so tired in his front feet that he could scarcely walk twenty yards on them, when I accidentally touched him in the flank with a spur.

I finally got the critter to understand that it was my mistake, and he swung into that stiff legged lope of his that eats up distance like an outfit eats up grub.

With the sun down, and my red head relieved from the heat, I began to do a little thinking, which isn't just the easiest thing in the world to do when you are riding a cayuse that has a gait that comes near splitting you clear up to your Adam's apple every time it hits the ground, meaning, of course, every time the horse hits the ground.

If Rube Howell's count on the cards was right, there was just a chance that the trail I was traveling might be infested with vermin; one of them with an eagle-beak nose and the other with a voice like a horse with the heaves.

Of course, my boss, Rip Jaimson, had sent me out to bring in Jim Barber, but if I met up with these two gentlemen and, giving them the benefit of the doubt, brought them in alive, I had a feeling that Rip wouldn't fire me for going outside my jurisprudence, the which is a legal term that Squire Glynn frequently uses in his business of squiring. Even though it meant that I would have to finish my journey by moonlight, I pulled Napoleon down to a walk so there would be less danger of him busting through a cluster of scrub oaks into the midst of a couple of *hombres* who, more than likely, would be all broken out with shooting irons.

We had been creeping along the trail for half an hour, I reckon, when Napoleon woke up. Napoleon is an equine someambulist, the which Rip says is Latin for a horse that walks in its sleep; and when he is suddenly aroused out of his someambul there's always hell to pay. He'll be someambuling with his head to the north and wake up with his head to the south, making the switch with no warning. If you make the switch with him you're apt to twist your neck out of place, and if you don't make the switch with him you get your anatomy all mussed up.

Just where the trail turns sharply onto Sawyer's Flat, Napoleon came out of his someambul and switched ends. My thought being back there in the 'dobe with Rip, I was sort of out of balance, and I found myself all spread out on the trail, with my cayuse some ten feet away, blowing his nose as if he had a bad cold and had been eating hot soup.

While I sat there in the trail trying to figure out just how that horse could slip out from under me that way, Napoleon walked two or three rods, stopped, looked back and snorted again. At the same instant the evening breeze brought me the sound of blatting sheep, the which sound always gets me all fussed up inside, causing me to break out with profanity. I looked up the trail to where, across the flat, it topped a scrub fringed ridge before dropping into McKenna's draw, and what I saw didn't look much like Jacob's ladder.

Over the ridge came a herd of woollies, and the very sight of sheep gives me de-

lirious streamers! I couldn't blame my old horse, Napoleon, for bolting a trail where he had to meet a pack of those woolly, wet-nosed ba-bas; and I got to my feet intending to catch my horse and cut across country and get away from the sight of the swarm of vermin. Napoleon suddenly got kittenish, and it took me longer to catch him than I figured. By the time I was back in the saddle, the mildewed mutton had crossed the flat and were crowding into the trail through the scrub oak brush like so many lost spirits—and then, out of the tat-tat-tat- and the blithering blatting came the musical bawl of a cow. Besides making me feel more homelike, that sweet music had an unusual interest, for no self-respecting range cow will associate with a bunch of sheep of its own free will and accord.

I put Napoleon into the brush well back from the trail, being careful to get up the wind so we wouldn't have to smell those sheep, and waited for the driveling bunch to drag by. First came some sheep. These were followed by some more sheep which were just ahead of a lot more sheep that were just behind them. I'm not much of a hand at guessing on numbers when they refer to sheep, seeing as how a thousand sheep more or less don't mean anything; but my best calculation is that five hundred sheep too many passed along that trail before the owner of that musical bawl came along, leading that part of the parade made up of about two hundred head of likely looking cattle. It was too dark for me to see the brand, Napoleon and I being no fewer than thirty yards back in the brush. The tail end of the procession was more sheep trying to make up in numbers what they lacked in beauty and importance.

Nobody runs cattle and sheep together like that, and having had some experience in picking the safe end of a gamble I would have bet my Old Betsy gun against a bow and arrow, the which is my idea of no weapon for a minion of the law, that those sheep were being used as a drag to cover up the trail of some perfectly good cattle. I climbed down from the saddle, dropped the reins on the ground, and edged a little closer to the trail. Seemed to me like as if some human critter ought to be decorating the landscape even if he was hiding out like the face in one of those puzzle pictures. I edged up toward the open flat and had gone about fifty yards when I saw a tolerably substantial shadow ducking from bush to bush, about fifty feet ahead of me. I just let that shadow set the pace and I trailed along. Directly it made a clump of oaks right alongside the trail, and it seemed to be settling down there for the night. Just when I had decided that it was time to formally introduce myself, the shadow straightened up, and I got a real shock because that shadow had a powerful resemblance to Jim Barber, and if Jim Barber would drive a bunch of sheep ahead and behind a bunch of cattle, then I guess I'd put a bridle on Napoleon's tail.

Just then I heard footsteps on the trail, and in the same instant that Jim Barber stepped out of the brush with a six-gun in his hand, and I heard his voice, as calm as if he were asking for a drink of sody water.

"Just put 'em up," he said, "and keep 'em up."

By moving three steps to the right I could see that Barber was standing in front of a very tall shadow that was considerably taller because it seemed to be reaching for the stars.

"Turn around," Barber orders, calm like so that if I had been the other shadow I would have moved as quickly as it did and asked no question. Barber walked up behind his man and plucked two shooting irons from his belt, tossing one hither and the other yon, so to speak. It was an interesting little show, and I was getting in for nothing, and that made it all the more enjoyable; but the second act was something different again.

"Drop it!" commanded a voice that sounded like the bellows in a blacksmith shop; and I saw a third shadow, a sort of sawed off and hammered down shadow, come out of the bushes on the farther side of the trail. Barber didn't hesitate. He dropped his gun as if the handle was red hot, and the sawed off shadow let out a laugh that had as much mirth in it as the bawling of a calf that had mired down in the quicksand. I could see, even in

the dusk, that they were playing some kind of a new game, and me being fond of sports and wanting to learn all I could about this here game of "put 'em up and drop it," I eased through the thicket, jumped Old Betsy out of her mother-hubbard, and calls out in my hog-farm tenor:

"All together now! Up with 'em!"

Up they went, the sawed-off shadow holding a likely looking gun in his left hand.

"Just let that shooting iron loose!" I ordered, and after my request had courteously been complied with I asked:

"Now, what do we do next? I ain't never played this game just this way before, and you fellows will have to coach me a little. Jim, you know more about the game than I do—just tip me off to what I do next."

"What do you generally do when you catch up with cattle rustlers?" Jim's voice still was as calm as if he were asking for a dollar's worth of white chips.

"First, I'd gather up all the artillery," I says. "Jim, me having lumbago from riding that Napoleon horse, won't you just gather up those perfectly good guns?"

Jim accommodated me. He was like that; a friend couldn't ask too much of a favor from Barber.

"Now you'll find my cayuse back there in the brush and a perfectly good rope hanging on the saddle. If it ain't asking too much of you, will you get the rope?"

Jim put off through the brush to fetch the rope, and seeing as how I seemed to hold all the aces in the deck, I moved a step nearer the two side-winders.

"Seems like we've met before," I said.

"You ain't got nothin' on us," says the short one with the voice like a bellows.

"I'm going to have a rope on you *poco pronto*," I said. "What happens to you after that depends on how I'm feeling when we come up with the first pinyon tree. What's the game, anyway?"

"That's plumb interesting," I said when both of them made a noise like a long silence. "When a fellow gets to the place where he can't speak out in meeting about his business, he's in a bad way. Where did you get the woollies?"

Nothing but considerable stillness.

"I don't blame you. If I was caught trailing a bunch of those wet-nosed ba-bas I wouldn't want to talk about it either. But how come the cattle?"

I've heard Rip Jaimson say there is an animal in the deserts of Egypt called a *spink*, the which never says nothing. Compared to these two *hombres*, that Egyptian *spink* would sound like an auctioneer. I didn't feel that it was quite polite for me to monopolize the conversation, so I shut up, and gave them a chance to open up on some subject more to their liking. They didn't seem to know enough about anything to start a conversation, to say nothing of finishing it, and by the time Jim came up with my rope there had been nothing of what Rip Jaimson calls persiflage.

With Jim again on my side of the house, I permitted the two men to lower their hands. I had Jim tie the big fellow's claws behind him, then take a half hitch around his neck. Running the rope back to the runt, Jim took a half hitch about shorty's neck, and then tied his hands behind him. If either of them got to cutting up, the other one got it in the neck.

"How far is it to a tree that's tall and strong enough to take care of these two coyotes?" I asked of Jim.

"Too far to try to make it at this time of day," Jim replied. "Better drag it for my shack. I think it might be interesting to entertain these boys for the evening."

"Maybe so," I admitted, "although, if I know anything, the which may be open to argument, it's the fact that a rattlesnake isn't safe company until it's dead. Where is your horse?"

"At the place; I've been trailing the tall boy on foot."

"Where's their horses?"

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "He was walking when I first sighted him."

"Then we'll hoof it for your place, if you'll just ride fence on them until I get old Napoleon out of the brush."

It was getting on toward dark by the time I came up with Napoleon, and when it gets dark that old horse hates to be alone; so I didn't have to waste any time getting hold of him.

We made quite an interesting parade as we marched up that trail, me trying to think just what was proper for a minion of the law to do under the circumstances. It's terrible hard for me to think when I'm walking, and I hadn't got very far by the time we made it to Jim's place; and then Jim brought up a subject that drove everything else from my mind.

"I guess the first thing on the program is a little food," he said as we came up to his shack, the which was a log house of two rooms with a lean-to hanging to the south side of it.

"Yes," I said; "only the 'little' is silent and is never pronounced in the presence of company."

"Very well, Red; I'll round up the grub while you get your live stock hobbled for the night."

"I'll turn old Napoleon into your corral and let him blow himself until we are ready to start back—"

"Start back!" Jim exclaimed. "You don't figure on doubling back to-night, do you?"

"Just that," I explained. "Reckon there's considerable news from Winslow, the which you haven't heard. Considerable of our voting population is out looking for these two *hombres*. Fact is, they are dragging the Shelf Country for them right now, and, more than likely, there's going to be an election when I get back to town with these chaps."

"What's the rest of the story?" Jim asked.

"Too long to tell you before supper. If you'll just keep an eye on these boys while I take care of Napoleon I'll give you an earful later."

We herded the two mavericks into the kitchen and made several important adjustments in their rope decorations, so that if they tried to run away they would have to do it sitting down and dragging Barber's home made bench with them. Jim assuring me that they wouldn't bother him much while he was getting the chow ready, I led Napoleon down to the corral, watered him, took off the bridle and saddle, and turned him in with Jim's horse, Black Opal, a likely piece of horseflesh that cost me considerable dinero when she beat Hank Barrett's gelding, Fence Buster, in the races last fall.

Jim Barber was a reasonable cook, and after I had done my duty by that supper I wondered more than ever why he hadn't long since been snatched into matrimony where his cooking would really count. Of course, he was doing his best because he had company. Because two of his guests didn't seem to have very good appetites, the main burden of appreciating Jim's cooking fell to me; the which is a burden I always seem to be able to carry.

I never tasted better coffee, and the three fried eggs I had were as good as you could expect, considered they were fried in bacon grease. The cold venison seemed to be a little tough, but I didn't notice it until after my fourth helping; and the fried cabbage would have been better if there had been more of it. Two pieces of raisin pie made me forget about the cabbage shortage; and, taken all in all, when we had finished, I felt the world was a comfortable place to live in, excepting right at the equator where things were pretty crowded even when I had let out my belt to the last hole.

There was a reason other than food that made me enjoy that supper. I did most of the talking, and that always makes a fellow enjoy the conversation.

We had untied our guests as to their arms and hands, and moved the table over to where they could get at it, that being easier than moving a bench with two men tied to it. Jim and I sat across the table, Jim being near the door leading to the lean-to and the cook stove, and I being near the door leading outdoors.

"By the way, Jim," I began, "what time was it when you pulled out from Winslow night before last?"

"Can't prove it by me," Jim admits. "It was late or early, according to which way you figure."

"Midnight, maybe?"

"Worse than that," he replied. "Black Opal traveled right along, but the sun caught us before we made Weimer's old shack."

"Two o'clock, maybe?" I suggested.

"More like it."

" Did you see anything of our two friends here?" I asked, being careful to do my pointing with my fork because Rip Jaimson once told me it wasn't stylish to use your knife too much at the table.

" Can't prove it by me," Jim admitted. " Believe I passed three fellows as I was making it across the flat toward 'dobe town and Garcia's corral where I had my horse."

" Well, did you hear anything—a shot, maybe?"

" Come to think of it, I did hear a couple of shots just as I was picking up the trail beyond the sand fence."

" Reckon you'll be interested in knowing," I said slow like, with my face pointed at my plate and my eyes watching our two guests, " some one drilled Rip Jaimson through the neck? I reckon those were the shots you heard."

Barber looked at me to make sure that I was talking sense, and when he saw that I meant it he said:

" Suppose it was a wild night in the old town after that. Where did they string up the fellows?"

" They didn't—not yet."

The sawed-off guest, with the voice like a blacksmith's bellows, the which he wasn't using much, squirmed a bit and jabbed his mouth with a knife that didn't have any egg on it.

" You don't mean to say that some one took a shot at Rip Jaimson and got away with it?" Jim Barber asked.

" That's about the how come of it. Seems like a couple of fellows 'lowed as how they wanted to see you make your get-away. Rip got wind of it, and he meandered over toward Garcia's corral just to be sure no one took advantage of you. Blooey! Fifteen minutes later we find Rip with a bullet through his neck."

Jim looked at me as if he was trying to get the answer to some question without asking it. Rip and Jim always were sort of fond of each other, and I had a notion I could answer that question for him; but for personal reasons, or impersonal ones, maybe, I wanted him to ask it.

" And Rip—what—how—Rip isn't—how is Rip making it?"

It was a hard question to ask, but an easy one to answer.

" If you had milled this range with Rip as long as I have, you'd know that it will take more than being drilled through the neck to kill that old centipede. He's getting on fine. Doc Sandow says he'll have him out again in a week."

" Well, whoever turned that trick wants to get all there is in life during the next week," says Jim.

The long guest with the eagle beak nose dropped one of his working tools, and I had to recover it for him.

" Who do they suspect?" Jim asked as he went into the lean-to for the old coffee pot.

" Well, being nothing but a deputy minion of the law, as you might say, I reckon it isn't up to me to say who they suspect. All I know is that Rip Jaimson, the who isn't allowed to talk, wrote out on a paper for me to go find Jim Barber and bring him in even if I had to arrest him."

Jim looked at me, sort of hard like, for a minute.

" Does Rip want me?" he asked.

" That's what I'm here for. He wants you, and wants you quick."

" What do you think is on his mind?" Jim asked.

" Well, Jim, I'm not too good at this mind reading stuff, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if, when we get back, we find he's got a woman on his mind."

That made the short guest look at the long one, when both of them thought I was looking at the bottom of the cabbage pan.

" It's either that, Jim, or he suspects that you have been guilty of contribution negligee."

" Of what?" Jim asked.

" That's a legal term," I explained to him, not surprised that a fellow like him wouldn't get it right off. " I think it means that a fellow helps somebody to commit a crime by not doing anything."

" Yes, yes," says Jim, " I understand. I've been guilty of contributory negligence, and Rip wants to see me."

" Right away," I added; " so we'll have to be dragging it as soon as you can get ready."

"What are you going to do with these two?" he asked. "It wouldn't be quite right to go away and leave my guests."

"Got a couple of saddle horses?"

"My bunch is down at the head of the cañon. Romero holds them down there."

"Looks like I'll have to ask you to ride over there and bring up a couple for our guests, if they won't be good enough to tell us where they hid out their horses."

"You ain't got no right to take us in," says the short guest with the roaring voice. "You ain't got no warrant fer us."

"Well, pard, it's just like this. I being a minion of the law, I ain't a free agent no more. If I didn't have this deputy badge on me, I wouldn't take you in. When I came to this range, when you caught somebody trailing a bunch of steers that didn't belong to him, you didn't take him in; and I'm free to say that that way of doing business rather appeals to me. But I'm a law minion, and I'm supposed to bring 'em in now, and let the law take its course. The boys never would forgive me if I didn't bring you in."

"You're brayin' on the wrong scent," says the long guest, thereby proving that he hadn't lost his voice altogether. "We didn't have nawthin' to do with the shootin' of the marshal."

"Don't misunderstand me," I says. "I ain't accusing you of having that much nerve. My notion is that anybody who will trail a bunch of woollies—"

"Hello, there!"

That yell drifted in from the night outside. Jim jumped up from the table and went to the door. Not knowing what might be drifting around in the moonlight, I hitched Betsy around where she would be handy if needed.

"Hello yourself!" Jim answered.

"That you, Barber?"

"You guessed it."

"Seen a stray bunch of sheep up this way?" The voice was coming nearer all the time and I thought I heard more footsteps than a two-legged man generally makes.

"Yes, I did, Trainor. Saw a bunch down beyond Sawyer's Flat."

"Anybody with them?"

The voice was near the door, and I wasn't mistaken about the footsteps, so I hitched back my chair so that I was facing the door.

"They were headed down the trail through the scrubs when I left them not more than two hours ago," Barber continued; "and there is nobody with them."

"I'm sorry, Barber, that bunch got up here on your range," said the fellow just outside the door; "but I reckon accidents will happen. Looks like sort of a bad mess. I found my herder, Gomez, dead down near Porcupine Spring, and the sheep had come this way. They don't generally wander toward the desert. Don't reckon you know anything about it, because you've always played pretty square with us fellows."

I knew what was coming, because Jim Barber was just that way. He'd tell the truth, regardless, and especially would he tell it when dealing with men who were none too friendly toward him, seeing how he was mostly interested in cattle and they were interested in sheep.

"Yes, Trainor—I know something about it."

And before I could think of a way of calling Jim off he had told that gang of sheep men—there were six of them in the shadows outside—the whole story.

"Reckon we've got a job ahead of us to-night," said Trainor. "We're certainly obliged to you for roundin' up these skunks, but we'll be glad to take 'em off your hands."

"A deputy marshal has them now," Jim explained; "and he is going to take them to Winslow."

"I reckon we don't need no deputy nothing to help us settle this business, Barber. All we want is these two men, and we'll do the rest."

"Of course, Trainor, as long as the deputy marshal and his two prisoners are in my shack I'm not going to give them up. There were two hundred head of my cattle mixed up with your sheep, and my notion about it is that it was my cattle they were really after, and they were using your sheep to cut up the trail. At any rate, I've an interest in seeing these fellows get what's coming to them."

Just for a moment an idea came near stampeding me. I could see my boss, Rip Jaimson, as he lay there white and still on his cot in our 'dobe. I looked across the table. The short guest was as white as snow, and the long fellow's face was all twisted until it looked like nothing human. His right hand gripped one of the table knives. There was fight in him, and I knew right then that he was a hard one.

Why not let the sheep men have them? But Rip Jaimson had his heart set on doing things according to the law, and he expected me to play the game that way; and that was that. I eased up to the door alongside of Jim Barber, my hands unoccupied but resting easy near a most powerful argument.

"Gents," I said, "it looks bad for these two *hombres*, and I reckon there was a time when I'd have been glad to join you in stringing them up to the nearest tree. But I'm a minion of the law, and I'm expected to deliver these fellows to the law. If it's possible for a redhead like me to do it, of course I'm a going to deliver.

"Now just read the cards. There's six of you all and there's just one of me, and all I've got on me is an old style five-gun. If you insist, one of you fellows probably will get my prisoners, if it's just you and I for it. But the minute you start anything I'm going to give each of my prisoners his shooting iron, because if I can't protect them in their legal rights they've got a right to protect themselves. That sort of evens up the gamble."

I didn't hear any wild cheering and hand-clapping when I finished that speech, so I started in again.

"I know it's sort of hard to make a quick decision on a thing like this, so I suggest that you hold a meeting out there some place and talk it over and see which card you want to put your money on. Before you name your bet it might be worth while to calculate what's going to happen if some one in these parts kills a deputy United States marshal. Somebody will have to answer for it if they have to send the cavalry into this country to get him. If you decide you'll risk your chips on trying to take these two men away from me, I'll know it when you start shooting."

With that I deliberately pushed Jim Barber back into the room and slowly closed the door. The minute it was shut I dropped the heavy bar in place and got busy with Jim, getting our two prisoners out of range of the windows. Right at that moment I would have given a minion of the law's yearly pay if I could have been in Winslow, and less than ten hours later I'd have given the pay and a mortgage on my life if I could keep away from Winslow, the which goes to show that life is more or less uncertain and unexpected, if not more so.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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FRESH AIR

THE air it kissed her on the brow,
And trifled with a curl,
And then caressed her dimpled neck—
Oh, such a pretty girl!

The air it kissed her on the lips!
Undreamed of liberty!
The air was getting pretty fresh—
That's how it seemed to me!

Hamilton Pope Galt.



The Green Overcoat

By JOHN HOLDEN

"THE trouble with you," said the vocational expert to Homer Dobell, "is that you are too modest."

The timid young man who had come to New York to climb the ladder of success gulped painfully and tried to smile. He hitched forward in his chair, his mild blue eyes fixed upon his adviser, and shifted his crushed hat from his nervous right hand to his trembling left one.

"Then you—you don't think I can ever get to be a traveling salesman?" Dobell queried plaintively.

The urbane gentleman who made a good living by advising people whether they should become plumbers or portrait painters, farm hands, or ambassadors, leaned back in his swivel chair. Obviously he was not handicapped by modesty. His tweed business suit, his diamond scarf pin and his mahogany office fixtures cried aloud that success was his.

"I did not advise you to embrace salesmanship," he stated. "You are not the type that succeeds in that line. You are inherently self-effacing; it is not in your nature to blow your own horn. Modesty, which is an overrated virtue at best, is entirely out of place in a vocation where personal publicity counts for much. For instance, the wearing of a flashy suit or overcoat, which brings joy to a born salesman because of the attention it brings him, would only embarrass you."

"You think, then, that I had better stick to clerical work?" Dobell questioned miserably.

"Undoubtedly," advised the career pilot. "There your abnormally strong sense of caution and predilection for trifling details is an asset, whereas in the selling profession both these qualities are handicaps because a salesman must tackle big situations in a big way and leave hampering details to smaller minded assistants."

Disappointment pulled down the corners

of Dobell's sensitive mouth as though weights were tied to them.

"But selling is what I want to do," he complained plaintively.

The molder of destiny smiled commiseratingly.

"Unfortunately, many men wish to follow vocations for which they are unfitted and that is why so many are failures," he explained. "It is the duty of the vocational expert to set their footsteps in the right path, and that is what I am doing for you, my friend."

Dobell dragged himself up to a standing posture—a commonplace fellow in a drab suit, with the round shoulders of the desk worker and the wistful countenance of the impotently ambitious.

"Maybe you're right," he admitted.

"I know I'm right."

"I guess I'll stick to bookkeeping."

"Very good; ten dollars, please."

Dobell paid the fee, and went out into the street considerably more discouraged than when he had entered. He had come to New York to climb the ladder of success and was due to start work on his first metropolitan job the following Monday morning. It was office work, but the company employed a number of salesmen, and Dobell had hoped eventually to work into the selling end. He was sure he would like selling as much as he disliked desk work and that, once started in a congenial calling, he could achieve the success that he felt would never be his in accountancy. With nothing to do on Saturday, he had decided to consult the vocational expert, confident that he would receive encouragement and practical advice.

Now Homer Dobell wished he had not done so. He felt as though he had been sentenced to a life of hard labor. Even the poor palliative of hope for the future, which even the most abyssmal failure may indulge in, was now denied him. He wished he had remained back home in his native town, contented with his flour mill position and the social importance of a fairly robust frog in a very small puddle. The joyous anticipation with which he had looked forward to his new job no longer was his.

Dobell ate a frugal luncheon, and then, with the long Saturday afternoon stretching lonesome and dreary before him, he went down town to look at his new employer's building.

It was an imposing structure and the firm's name was painted on it in letters ten feet high. Evidently modesty would be as much out of place there as mourning is at a mardi gras.

With the high browed expert's words still tolling in his ears, Dobell sat on a City Hall bench and considered his ten dollars' worth of advice. Yes, modesty was inherent in his nature; he was backward and self-effacing; he did not wish to advertise himself in flashy clothes or in any other attention compelling manner.

But if it is really part of a good salesman's business to thrust himself forward on all occasions, as the expert claimed, why could he not learn to become a thruster? Why not put his career impeding modesty to route? If a go-getter must wear attention compelling clothes, for instance, why should he not learn to wear them? He could, by Jove, and he would! His mind snapped to a decision with the celerity of a steel trap.

Take his overcoat, for instance. It was cheap, drab colored, and almost worn out. Why not replace it with a flashy one? One that would shout the wearer's importance, that would attract his boss's attention, that would conceal his handicap of modesty, that would proclaim to the world that he was no ordinary clerk, but a born salesman who merely awaited an opportunity to follow his natural calling? In that way, he might yet make good, despite the expert's prediction.

Dobell inventoried his financial resources. He could afford a new coat, though not an expensive one. Still, it was an expensive one that he wanted. He recollected having read that Bowery stores are cheaper than Broadway ones, so, with the idea of buying an impressive looking overcoat at a modest price, Dobell sauntered up the famous East Side thoroughfare.

He stopped in front of a small clothing store to examine some overcoats that hung outside, and was a bit surprised to find that

new ones cost practically as much as on Broadway. A salesman pounced out of a doorway and begged him to look at the superior bargains inside, but Dobell was wary of sidewalk salesmen and dubious about bargains that were too good to be displayed, so he walked on.

Two blocks farther on he stopped and uttered an exclamation. There, on a coat hanger, half concealed by a badly worn coat, was precisely the garment he had in mind. A big, burly, shaggy overcoat, it was, heavy and expensive looking, cut on swagger lines, and, best of all, its color was such that it could not fail to attract attention. It was a light green, with dark blue stripes that subdivided it into squares as big as soda biscuits. Dobell eyed it eagerly. In that coat, a fellow could make even New York sit up and look at him.

The alert storekeeper dashed out.

"Sheap!" he cried, and waved his hands like flags. "Vorn so little you'd never notice it was second-hand if I didn't tell you, but I let it go for only forty dollars, half price' an' a bargain like you'll never see nowhere else in all N' York."

Forty was more than Dobell had counted on paying, nevertheless, he allowed the dealer to put the coat on him. It fitted perfectly.

"Come inside. Vait till you see yourself in the glass yet. Sheap at sixty dollars, I tell you. Every cent of eighty it cost." The merchant clicked on electric lights. "Fit you like the skin on the banana. Lookit the label—Fifth Avenue yet!"

The label appeared genuine; the coat seemed to be everything that Dobell desired. But the price was too high.

"Give you twenty-five," he offered.

The Hebrew called upon Providence to protect him from the ravages of customers.

"Thirty-five an' take it avay," he cried.

"Twenty-five," Dobell repeated.

The merchant paced up and down, pulling his beard and imploring heaven to come to his rescue.

"Thirty dollars, I make you the price. Take it avay quick before my mind I change."

Again Dobell eyed the splendid garment, then held out three ten dollar bills.

"Receipt, please," he said.

The merchant added the bills to a roll as big as a tomato can and jammed the wad back into his greasy pocket.

"No receipt," he said. "I gif you the coat for half nodding an' that's the end. I got no time for write receipt."

Dobell was about to demand one when he recollected the vocational expert's words, to the effect that he had a predilection for trifling details and that such a habit, while estimable in a clerk, only handicapped a salesman. After all, what did a receipt matter? He had obtained thousands of them and never had been benefited thereby. Since he aspired to be a salesman, he must learn to disregard such trifles.

"All right; never mind the receipt," he said to the storekeeper, and went out, carrying his old coat and wearing the new one.

He had not proceeded two blocks before he felt in better spirits. The expert was wrong! The man had predicted that Dobell would feel embarrassed in a flashy overcoat, yet here Dobell was, wearing the most striking overcoat on the street with no more embarrassment than a film beauty feels in a bathing suit.

Nor did Dobell feel embarrassed when he entered his new place of employment on Monday morning. It was a huge office, with scores of desks arranged in rows, and already dozens of the employees, men and young women, were on hand, preparing to begin the day's work. He felt every eye upon him as he stopped at the office manager's desk, and when he walked down the long aisle to the coat room he knew he was the envy of every man in the place. He hung up his gorgeous green coat with a flourish and began his work with a comfortable feeling that he had made a good start in his pursuit of a selling career.

At noon he slipped on the big, shaggy garment with a degree of pride that he never had felt before in any coat, and, as he walked up the aisle, he could not help but notice that more than one of the prepossessing young ladies in the place was paying him the not unwelcome compliment of approving glances.

When he returned from luncheon the office manager beckoned to him.

"Nice overcoat you've got," he remarked casually.

Dobell felt hugely gratified. His system surely was the correct one. This was the way to get promoted; first attract attention, then demonstrate that one is worthy of it.

"Not so bad," he answered.

"Had it long?"

Dobell throttled a temptation to add to his moral victory by proclaiming that he was long accustomed to luxury.

"Just since Saturday," he replied virtuously.

"Wish I could afford one like it."

Elation replaced mere gratification as Dobell undertook his afternoon duties. He would show the self-styled expert in vocation choosing that he was a know-nothing. Before summer came, probably, he could boast to the folks back home that already he had achieved his ambition to become a salesman. Since every eye was upon him, he must of course do his work well.

He was absorbed in his task half an hour later when the officer manager appeared at his side.

"Getting along nicely, Dobell?" he inquired.

"I think so."

"Glad to hear it. The boss likes conscientious workers."

Dobell grinned with pleasure.

"I hope that I'll attract the president's favorable attention," he said.

"You've already done it. He wants to see you in his office. That's what I came here to tell you."

"Really?" The announcement seemed almost too good to be true.

"Maybe it's your overcoat he wants to see. At any rate, you are to take it in with you, and your hat as well."

Dobell's elation abated just a trifle as he proceeded to the president's office with his hat and overcoat. The disturbing thought came to him that a discharged man would walk out in just such a manner.

The president, however, welcomed him cordially enough. He was obviously a man of high standing in the business world; athletic looking, though middle aged, with an air of conscious authority and power and not many signs of modesty. There was a secretary in the office, too, a golden haired girl who smiled at Dobell in a peculiar manner that he failed to comprehend.

"That's a nice coat you have," said the president. "May I look at it?"

Dobell handed over the resplendent green garment. The boss examined it swiftly, tossed it into an empty chair, and smiled in the same odd manner that the girl did.

"You haven't been wearing that coat very long, have you, Mr. Dobell?" he inquired.

Dobell admitted that he had procured it only the previous Saturday.

"New?" queried the big boss.

Dobell's natural embarrassment descended heavily upon him as he admitted that he had secured it for thirty dollars from a second-hand dealer on the Bowery.

"Ah! That explains it," said the president.

There was an awkward pause and then Dobell summoned up the courage to ask what it was that was explained.

"How you came into possession of my overcoat that was stolen from me in a Park Row restaurant last Saturday," said the boss.

Dobell gasped. The president's overcoat! That was why he had attracted attention in the office, why the pretty secretary smiled, why the big boss summoned him into his private office. Instead of looking up to him, every one regarded him as a dupe or a thief!

"That, you see, explains why you were able to buy the garment so cheaply," explained the president.

Dobell did not doubt this statement. It did not occur to him to question the boss's claim. He made no protest when Mr. Holcomb picked up the garment in a proprietary manner and slung it over his arm.

"Some men might suspect that you stole this coat in the restaurant because it has been found in your possession," said the great man. "Fortunately for you, I haven't got a suspicious nature, so I accept your explanation. But, just the same, I'd like to prosecute the thief, so let's go together to the second-hand dealer and see if he can tell us from whom he bought it."

The secretary did a bit of telephoning,

and when the humble clerk and the big boss reached the sidewalk a luxurious closed car was waiting for them. They entered it and the liveried chauffeur whirled them toward the Bowery and up that avenue to the second-hand clothing man's store. There Dobell showed the coat, reminded the proprietor that he had purchased it from him on Saturday, and asked how it came into his possession. Mr. Holcomb seconded the request, adding that it had been stolen from him.

With a surprising air of stupidity, the proprietor gazed from the boss to the clerk.

"Vat?" he said to Dobell. "You say you got it from me that coat?"

"Sure," said Dobell. "Last Saturday afternoon. You couldn't help but recollect it because we had an argument over the price."

The Hebrew shook his woolly old pate.

"No," he said. "Not from me did you get it. From some other dealer, mebbe, but not from Isador Cohen. I never saw that coat before, nor you, neither."

The brazen effrontery of the man almost took Dobell's breath away. His dismay was not lessened when he noted that his boss was eying him with suspicion.

"If you bought it here, surely you can prove it," Mr. Holcomb said. "Where's your receipt?"

In a flash of hideous realization, Dobell understood now why the dealer had balked at giving him a receipt when he requested it. The man knew the coat was a stolen one and would not hand out proof that he was a receiver of stolen goods. And, for the first time in years, Dobell had not insisted upon a receipt. The vocational expert told him that broad minded men do not bother about trifles, and he had followed that asinine advice!

Flush faced and floundering in his speech, Dobell was forced to admit that he could not prove his purchase of the coat.

"Is that so?" said the boss and eyed him coldly. "I guess you and I had better return to the office and have a little heart-to-heart talk, young man."

Pale as paper and wabbly in the knees, Dobell reëntered the closed car, which, somehow had the appearance of a patrol wagon, and a few minutes later stood again in the president's office. The latter glared at him out of eyes that were as cold and hard as iron rivets.

"Young man," he said, "is there any good reason why I shouldn't summon a policeman and have you jailed for stealing my overcoat?"

With an effort Dobell summoned courage to make a feeble defense.

"I didn't steal it," he said. "I bought it just as I claimed. The dealer refused to give me a receipt, and I didn't insist on it." He explained why he did not.

"So you want to become a salesman," commented the president.

"Yes; that's why I bought the coat—to try and show the world that I'm a man of importance."

Over in her corner, the pretty secretary hid her mirth behind her notebook. Dobell saw her and felt about as comfortable as a cow on ice. But it vexed him, too, and he put a bit of spirit into his defense.

When he concluded the president sat for a moment in silence, gravely eying his clerk.

"Well," he said at last, "your defense is at least partly convincing. So I'll not carry out my first intention, which was to have you arrested. But you can readily understand, Dobell, that I cannot retain an employee who cannot entirely clear himself from a charge of theft. You are therefore discharged, but may retain your freedom." He indicated the door.

But Dobell did not immediately step toward it. From somewhere deep down in his subconscious being, anger surged up. He eyed the green overcoat, which the great man had flung carelessly into an empty chair. He had paid good money for that coat.

"Am I expected to leave behind that coat, which cost me thirty dollars?" he asked.

"You certainly are," said Mr. Holcomb; "haven't I told you it's my coat?"

Suddenly meek Mr. Dobell forgot that he was a humble clerk and that the man who faced him was an emperor of industry; he forgot the advice of the vocational expert; forgot everything except the sense of

injustice and injury that now clutched him. In this crisis, the greatest he ever had faced in his colorless life, his brain accelerated to lightning activity. Without flying into a passion, which he sensed would defeat him in a mental encounter with a man like Mr. Holcomb, he acted in a manner that he never would have dared to contemplate in a calmer moment. He stepped swiftly across the floor and snatched up the overcoat.

"Pardon me, Mr. Holcomb," he said in a well controlled voice that nevertheless throbbed with the intensity of his feeling, "but this coat was bought and paid for by me."

Disregarding the president's grim expression, he continued:

"Whether I have a receipt or not makes no difference. The whole office force saw me wear this coat into the office this morning. Despite the fact that you picked it up and tossed it around, this overcoat is still in my possession. And possession, please remember, is nine points of the law."

Mr. Holcomb glared at him.

"Proceed, sir!" he commanded.

Dobell did so, calmly and logically.

"When a person claims ownership of an article which is in the possession of another, sir, it is required that the claimant shall identify the claimed article. I shall have to ask, therefore, before I surrender this garment to you that you shall identify it as your property."

Mr. Holcomb rose to his feet.

"Certainly I can identify it," he said. "It's my coat. Every one here has seen me wear it." He turned to his secretary, who was eagerly listening. "Isn't this my coat?" he asked.

"It appears to be," the girl answered.

"Appearances do not count," stated Dobell. "The article must be positively identified. Since the coat is a ready made one, scores of others just like it are in existence. For all I know, the coat which you lost, Mr. Holcomb, merely looked like this one."

The boss took a step toward Dobell, but the latter returned his glare so fiercely and held the coat in such a determined manner that the great man evidently abandoned his intention of taking forcible possession of it.

"There's a label in the pocket," he said. "I can identify it by that."

Dobell looked.

"Merely the ordinary label which a manufacturer places in all his coats. It doesn't bear your name."

"Well—well—" The great man stuttered and looked baffled.

"If you can even state that a certain button is loose—any little thing like that—it might be held to be an identification of the property as yours," Dobell suggested.

Mr. Holcomb flushed angrily.

"Damn it, sir, do you think I have time to notice trifles like that?"

Dobell took a step toward the door. His hat was in his hand and the overcoat was over his arm.

"Since you have failed to identify the coat as yours," he said, "you must pardon me if I insist on retaining possession of it."

Holcomb barred his way.

"Look here, young man—" he began threateningly.

But Dobell could not be intimidated.

"If you doubt the legality of my action, you may call a policeman," he suggested.

Holcomb made no reply, so Dobell proceeded toward the door. His hand was on the knob when the president cried:

"Wait!"

"Yes?" queried the clerk.

Holcomb looked less ferocious. He sat down at his desk and pointed to a chair beside it.

"Sit there," he requested mildly.

Dobell did so—still retaining a tight hold on the coat.

"Where did you learn to talk in that calm and logical manner?" the president asked.

For the first time the naturally timid clerk realized that he had adopted a high and mighty tone toward a man who outclassed him in the business world as the Woolworth Tower outclasses a squatter's shack. Confusion crimsoned his cheeks for a moment. And then self-confidence came to him as he realized that in the verbal battle he had more than held his own.

"I just talked as I felt, sir," he said.

"You put up a mighty fine talk. Do you know that?"

"Thank you, sir."

"You argued in precisely the right way—logically, yet forcibly, but with no trace of the anger that you must have felt."

"I tried to be respectful, sir."

"Lots of men—even men who make a business of talking—our own salesmen for instance—could not have done so well."

"I'm glad I convinced you that my position is lawful."

"You did!" Mr. Holcomb banged his fist into his open palm. "And you convinced me of more than that. You made me realize that it is a mistake to let you leave the employ of this company."

Dobell gasped.

"Didn't you remark that you wished to become a salesman?" the president asked.

"Yes!" said Dobell with fervor. "That's the one thing in the world that I want to be. That's what got me into this overcoat trouble. The vocation expert said I was too modest for selling, and I bought the flashy overcoat to try to show the world I'm not modest. He said I shouldn't bother about trifling details, and that's why I didn't get the receipt that would have proved my purchase of the coat."

Mr. Holcomb rose and smiled genially.

"You are going to remain here, Mr. Dobell," he said. "You will spend six months in the stock room to learn the business, and then you will go on the road as a salesman."

Dobell exclaimed: "I can't tell you how much I thank you!"

The president held out three ten dollar bills.

"But there is a condition attached," he stipulated. "You must accept this money and give me back my overcoat."

Dobell took the bills.

"Glad to," he said. "I really thought all the time that it belonged to you."

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I WONDER

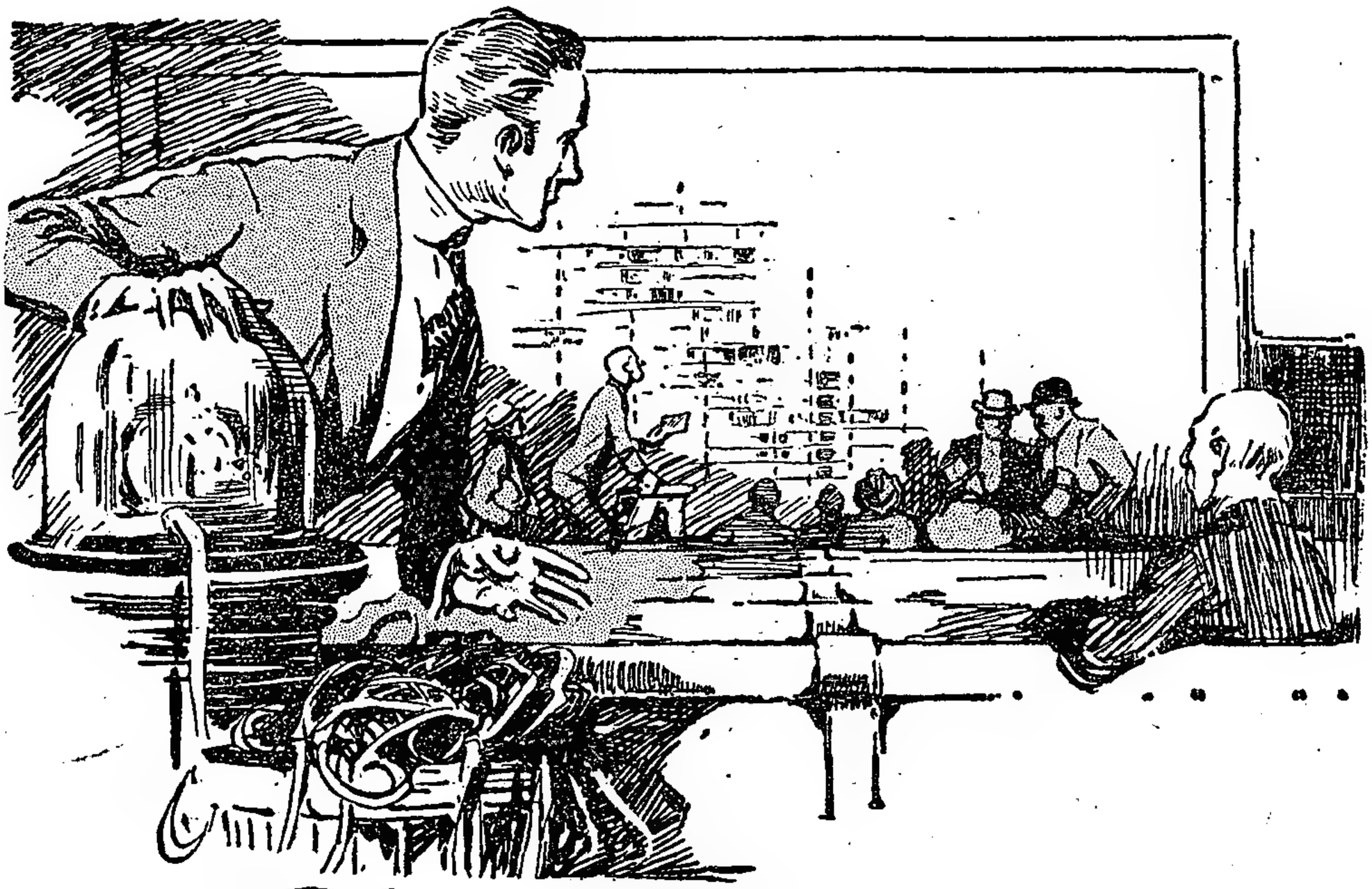
I WONDER why the folks that say their money is a drag,
And all their happy days were spent before they got their pelf,
Don't leave their stocks and bonds and cash out somewhere in a bag,
And signify to you or me to come and help ourself?

I wonder why the women that complain they're slaves to style,
And have to go to rest cures and be treated weeks and weeks,
Don't chuck the whole idea, and buy some stuff that lasts a while,
And have it made up simple, so they wouldn't look like freaks?

I wonder why the man who claims his biz takes all his time,
And wishes for the farm, where he was satisfied—and good,
Don't quit a piling dollars, and in some congenial clime
Go milk the gentle bossy, and get up the winter's wood?

I wonder why the nutty ones that study people's ways,
And find their fads and follies and things they do the worse,
Don't mind their own blame business, turn off their searching gaze,
And stop their silly wondering in vague and vacant verse?

Beech Hilton.



Big Game

By LOUIS LACY STEVENSON

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

WHEN Josiah Forsythe, a niggardly Ohio farmer, ousts his old neighbor, Sam Thompson, from his farm because he cannot meet a mortgage, his son, John Forsythe, looks on approvingly.

John determines he will go after "big game," which, in his opinion, is money. He forces his father to pay him five dollars a week for his labor on the farm, and when, after two years of toil, he saves a hundred dollars, he leaves his father, brother Hiram, and mother, Mary, on the farm and goes to Unionville, a near-by town.

There John gets a job in a grocery store where Ralph Walters, a spendthrift youth, is also a clerk, and takes the cheapest room in the cheapest boarding house in town. Marie Riggers, another boarder, discovers when she tries to fascinate him, that he is not interested in girls. As time passes John, by saving every cent, lending money to less provident acquaintances and demanding double the sum in return for the accommodation, and forcing Ben Johnson, the grocer, to increase his wages, builds up his bank account. When Walters fails to return a loan Forsythe garnishees his wages and Walters flees from town. Finally Forsythe decides he has enough money to pursue "big game" in Chicago and leaves Unionville without a word of farewell from any one, in a day coach.

CHAPTER X.

THE CITY OF BIG GAME.

JOHN FORSYTHE awakened just as the sun was gilding the Indiana prairies, his head aching and his neck stiff. He was far from being refreshed, as his rest had been broken at every station by a raucous voiced brakeman, and passengers leaving and boarding the train. He made a hurried and ineffective toilet at the ice water tank, and was one of the first to leave the train in the gloomy terminal known as "the Polk Street Depot."

Walking through the long train shed, John Forsythe was a much different figure

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from the boy who had come to Unionville. He was no longer a slab-sided stripling in awkward, ill-fitting crossroads clothing, overcome by his transplanting. His body had filled out symmetrically and he held himself erect and looked at the world with level gray eyes—eyes that gave the impression of imperviousness just as granite does. Furthermore, his clothes were of excellent material and of the latest cut.

Nor was the suit he was wearing his entire wardrobe; hence the necessity for a trunk. A complete outfit had been made for him by Stretcher from the newest fashion plates sent on especially from the East, and Forsythe noted with not a little satisfaction that his apparel did not suffer by contrast with that of the prosperous looking men who were getting out of the sleeping cars.

To the casual observer—and his bearing seemed to confirm this—John Forsythe was a successful business man, instead of a mere youngster who had come to the city to make his fortune.

If he felt any trepidation as he passed along the line of importuning cab drivers, he did not show it. Nor did the strange call, "Taxi," cause him to hesitate, though he felt a desire to stop and examine these vehicles. There were a few automobiles in Unionville, but they were regarded as toys and not anything practical. In fact, he could remember the first automobile that had come to Unionville. The *Daily News* had run a double leaded advance notice, and every one who could do so was on hand to greet the strange, two seated, self-propelled machine. It had been driven all the way from Detroit, scaring horses along the way, and the Unionville hitching racks had been almost uprooted.

But instead of lingering and thus exposing his greenness, he kept on. He would have proceeded directly to the elevated, having had explicit directions as to how to get to his destination, if it had not been for his trunk.

Frost, the traveling man who had told the story of old Jonesy and thus had pointed out to Forsythe the way to a prosperous business, had enlightened him concerning a small room out on Paulina Street obtainable for a few dollars a week, with plenty of cheap restaurants in the vicinity. The elevated would take him to within a block of this location for a nickel, but first he had to arrange transportation for his baggage.

With further advice from Frost fixed firmly in his mind, Forsythe walked by the uniformed men near the station exit on down to those carriers whose calling was proclaimed by nickel plated badges on their caps. Their charges were less than the regular lines, Frost had said, because they were independents and their fees were governed entirely by the amount of business they could get.

When Forsythe stopped at last he was surrounded immediately and brisk bargaining ensued, but despite his skill and his best efforts he found there was a vast difference between prices for baggage hauling in Unionville and Chicago. In Unionville the standard charge for transporting a trunk anywhere within the corporate limits was twenty-five cents, while in Chicago the best price he could obtain was two dollars and a half—a fact which made him wish heartily he had crowded all his belongings into two suit cases.

"All right," he said, at last surrendering his check to an unshaven individual; "and I'll ride out with you."

"Like hell you will," was the quick retort. "What do you think my horse is? If you ride, it will cost you another dollar."

"I can go out on the elevated for a nickel," replied Forsythe hotly.

"Take the elevated then; you'll gain time. Do you think I'm after takin' all that jaunt for one measly trunk? If you do, you lose. I'll wait right here till I get three or four more going in that direction, and then the trip 'll pay me. If you want to stick around I'll take you along for fifty cents."

Indignantly, Forsythe turned on his heel and walked toward the Loop. He might as well find his room, get everything out of the way, and be ready to look for a job the first thing Monday morning. Time was money, and he could not afford to be wasteful.

As he walked along Dearborn Street

his reaction was that of approaching a cañon. Before him were the financial institutions of the city, the great office buildings, wherein were laid the plans and the deals by which fortunes were made. His pulses beat rapidly. Some day his name would be known up and down that narrow street.

"Good morning," said a pleasant voice; and Forsythe turned.

A stranger smiling at him fell into step without invitation, his movement being as natural and graceful as though one acquaintance was meeting another.

"Just got in from down in Illinois," he continued. "Thought I'd walk around and size things up a little before hunting a hotel. My first trip here. You're a stranger also?"

Forsythe nodded cautiously.

"Thought I saw you get off. Some town this. Makes me feel lonesome. That's why I started to talk to you. What do you say to dropping in somewhere and having a little drink? Must be a saloon open around here even if it is Sunday."

"I never drink."

"I never do, either—in my home town—only a little snifter now and then when the W. C. T. U. can't keep cases on me. Boys will be boys, you know. I'm told you can do things in Chicago you can't do at home because the neighbors would talk."

Forsythe didn't reply. He was studying the man beside him. Something gave a false note to the geniality, and he was on his guard. He had heard much of games worked on strangers. He felt sure he did not look like a rube, and if the stranger had taken him for one he was mistaken. Still his perspicacity in noting that Forsythe was a newcomer was excellent.

They had gone only a little more than a block, Forsythe still silent, when the stranger darted to the curb and picked up a fat purse. Looking around carefully and seeing that he was unobserved, he beckoned to Forsythe and stepped into a hallway. Opening his find a trifle, he exposed a tantalizing exhibit of greenbacks, and without an invitation Forsythe followed him into a convenient alley.

"'Finders is keepers,'" said the stranger. "But I'll let you in on this if you keep your mouth shut. We can't divvy here. We'll just stroll along until we come to some nice, quiet place, and then we'll count it and split it two ways."

The wallet went into his pocket and together they walked along the street, and as they did so John Forsythe darted looks of contempt at the man beside him. They had gone only a short distance when they encountered a policeman. The stranger endeavored to ooze into a small billiard hall, but Forsythe clutched him.

"Come on in and I'll split on the square with you," he whispered; but Forsythe did not release his hold.

The stranger gave a violent but ineffectual jerk, and the patrolman, noting the struggle, quickened his pace.

"Officer," said Forsythe, "this bum tried to work the old pocketbook game on me."

"I know him," was the response. "He's the Thirty Dollar Kid. He hangs around railroad stations and cons strangers. Come on along, Thirty Dollar; we've got a nice stone room for you."

The confidence man started to argue, but steel nippers on his wrist silenced him, and he was led away, Forsythe keeping in the background. If this was a pitfall in the way of newcomers, these braggart city swindlers were only squirrels, he thought. That game was so old it was known in Unionville. All the same, he would not be detained as a witness, as that would not be a good introduction to Chicago.

Nor was he. Near the patrol box the Thirty Dollar Kid broke free and melted in the crowd. The officer pursued him until he was well out of the press, then gave up. Finding a little privacy behind a shoulder of a building, he stowed something green in his helmet; and John Forsythe conceived a new respect for the police force. Forsythe further congratulated himself on having listened to descriptions of swindlers by traveling men in Unionville. Otherwise he might have been tempted to disaster, as the contents of that pocketbook were large bills.

There was no difficulty about the room.

The cost was five dollars a week, the landlady said, and as this was only a dollar a week more than he paid in Unionville the fears aroused by the encounter with the expressman were dissipated.

"I'll take it," he said, after inspecting the dark nook shown him. "What time do you serve dinner?"

"Why, I don't serve meals," replied the woman in a surprised tone.

She was not nearly so surprised as John Forsythe, who had seen no necessity for eating in restaurants when the weekly rate for board and room was so reasonable. But five dollars a week for a room and no meals —that was outrageous!

"I guess I don't want it," he said, forgetting he had ordered his trunk sent to that address.

"All right," was the snappy response as the door slammed shut.

Burning with indignation for the one who had directed him to a female highway robber, Forsythe hurried down the steps and spent five cents for a newspaper. Late that evening he was back. He had walked miles, had wasted hours and many nickels in car fare, only to be defeated.

"That room's gone," said the landlady cheerfully. "The only one I have left is six dollars."

Beaten, John Forsythe asked to be shown the room. So far as he could see, the only difference in the rooms was that the six dollar one had two pictures on the wall, while the five dollar one had only half as much art. Pictures were not an essential in his existence—especially at a weekly rental of one dollar each—but he was weak after his battles with other Chicago landladies, so he surrendered.

And to his chagrin, that extra dollar was not all. His trunk had arrived in his absence, and had been placed in the basement. To have it brought upstairs he had to part with fifty cents.

A night's sleep—marred more or less by the elevated, which seemed to run right through the room, and early morning noises which his untuned ear could not classify—and the resiliency of youth restored Forsythe to such an extent, despite his wounds, that when he arose the next morning he was ready for the problem of a place, a toe hold by which he could begin the climb that would end in the eminence from which he could bring down big game.

He knew exactly what he wanted; the only difficulty lay in finding it. He could not set out blindly, as he had done in Unionville, because Chicago was obviously too large for such a course. What he intended seeking was a place in an establishment where stocks and bonds were sold. So he bought a *Tribune,* and read the classified section as he ate the rolls and drank the coffee served to him by a waitress whom the other patrons called Maude, and who stared at him curiously when he failed to leave any money on the more or less spotted tablecloth.

Shortly after noon of that same day he found the employment he sought, but not on Dearborn Street. He had answered many advertisements and had walked many miles, car fare being obnoxious to him—only to find the more desirable places filled by earlier arrivals. The office where he was finally employed, however, was only a little way out of the financial district. It was large and busy and along one side was a great blackboard on which were posted quotations on many securities.

"Big game," said John Forsythe to himself as he lay down to sleep after his first day's work, the rattle and roar of the elevated failing to disturb his thoughts. "Big game at last, and all I have to do is to work, watch and wait, and it will be mine."

CHAPTER XI.

AN ENCOUNTER.

THE moment John Forsythe began his duties as clerk in the brokerage house of Fyske, Fyske & Browne, he started to study those about him. To climb he believed firmly he would have to displace some one, and his quest was for the point of least resistance.

The customers were subjects of close observation also, and he applied himself so intently to them that he learned not only their interests but their idiosyncrasies as well. With them be began a classification

on which he staked his entire future. His object was to eliminate all of minor importance, for he realized that the magnitude of his course was such that to achieve success he would have no time for any except the major.

Nor did he neglect the business of the firm. In fact, he centered his greatest energy on that, studying theory by night and practice by day. Because of his studies in Unionville, from the start he had a fair knowledge of the processes involved in the dealings in which the firm engaged.

Nothing was too small to escape his attention, and the habits of industry acquired early in life were the opposite of a handicap. Other brokers' clerks might spend their spare time in dissipation, but not John Forsythe. He was not tempted despite the examples about him. His singleness of purpose saved him.

He found that the same energy, the same willingness to work that had brought him recognition—unwilling though it was—from Ben Johnson, had exactly the same effect in Chicago, but with this difference: Fyske, Fyske & Browne, a young firm, were striving desperately for an appearance of absolute stability, and the belief was that permanence of personnel was an assistance.

The elder Fyske walked about the office constantly, his hands under the tails of his long, black coat, his neatly trimmed, gray beard touching the lapels of his fresh, white vest, his fried-egglike eyes beaming benignly through his gold rimmed glasses, greeting customers and rendering little services, but always finding time to stop at the desks of the younger men.

" Grow up with us, and I can assure you your future is safe," he would say, a kindly look on his face. " Put your whole self into your work, and your reward will be certain."

As he was president of the firm, Forsythe listened to him attentively and respectfully at first, but repetition dulled his ears, and after a while when the older Fyske would stop to deliver his platitudes, while outwardly listening closely, John Forsythe's mind was busy with other matters. A word here and there and little indications that were faint but definite had told him that while Reginald J[illegible]neson Fyske was nominally the head of the business, the real firm was the younger Fyske and Browne; so when either of them spoke he gave full attention.

The other Fyske, whom the president called " Tommy," was a little man all wire and nerves. When business was brisk he popped about the office as though propelled by some one of the milder explosives; his black eyes snapping, his short, bristly brown hair standing almost straight up. Frequently he would bounce into the office marked " Mr. Browne, Private," be absent a few minutes, and then bound out again. Often Forsythe wondered how so small a frame could contain so much physical energy.

In that office labeled " Mr. Browne, Private," was a man who came out onto the floor but seldom—a big, quiet, slow moving, slow speaking man, a man with a mind that had the keenness of a microscope with the field of a telescope. Such was Forsythe's estimate of him after he had been summoned there one afternoon and questioned briefly but in a manner that was like the application of a scapel to human flesh. He had made a serious blunder that had escaped the eye of the auditor but not that of Mr. Browne.

" I'll forget it this t me, Forsythe," said Browne after admissio s had been made. " But don't let it occur again."

The manner in which Browne's strong, white teeth clamped down on a wicked, black cigar convinced Forsythe that it would not be well to let it happen again.

The look in Browne's eyes was further revelation to Forsythe. It was a key to the emptiness of the words of the older Fyske. There was no paternalism in that firm. " Grow up with the business " were encouraging words, but they meant nothing unless the one growing up was able to deliver the goods.

Forsythe was satisfied. Fyske had nauseated him, had almost caused him to believe that he and those about were being coddled along. John Forsythe was ruthless and intended to be more so. He could not be softened by petting. Only hard men brought down big game.

The customers were big game. Each day's trading consisted of deals that represented thousands of dollars. It was a bull market, therefore brisk, and during business hours day after day John Forsythe saw paper fortunes made and lost. All of the talk was of money, of accumulations of almost unbelievable amounts, and when he reached his room at night Forsythe's dreams were of astounding sums.

The whole proposition was simple, just as simple as loaning one dollar and receiving two back—almost. You merely learned what stocks were going to rise and bought them, or what stocks were going to decrease in price and sold them. This knowledge was to be acquired, because day by day Forsythe had evidence that there were those who possessed it, and John Forsythe meant to make it his own. Night after night he studied all the data on which he could lay hands. Meticulously, as his knowledge increased, he analyzed the transactions of the day, seeking in them the secret of market tendencies.

So intent was he in this pursuit and so forgetful of self that he lost flesh, but his eyes were still bright, showing as they did the desire that was glowing so hot within him that it almost consumed him.

His wages were increased without coercion or even a request until his salary was far above even his imaginings, yet his thirst for more money was not cooled in the slightest. Money was everything. Speculation with the possibilities of easy money before him constantly tempted him, but the strength of his will was such that he banished his yearnings peremptorily. His experience was not enough yet for actual investment; the melon was not ripe for the cutting. He would not risk failure, so he must exercise the patience of the waiting cat, for the mice were bound to come out.

Other employees were neither so provident nor so farseeing. They traded on margins constantly, and Forsythe, as soon as he perceived this situation, turned it to his own benefit. Salaries could not stand the strain, and when the load of debt crushed down he offered relief at the rate of two dollars for every one loaned.

No surprise was occasioned by this, loan sharks being far from a novelty in that establishment. In fact, they were regarded as a necessary evil, and Forsythe soon had as many clients as he could handle. He also—as was the case in Unionville—had plenty of protection. The security was the job of the borrowers.

His income doubled and trebled, but still he was not satisfied. He was still dealing with squirrels. Then again spring had come and his unrest was more acute, for that old feeling of loneliness, of something lacking in his life, that had so agitated him in Unionville, was just as poignant in Chicago, though spring in the city was different.

The trees sent forth their glory of green and the parks became emerald plush, but there was an obvious element of artificiality and too much coal smoke. And when the wind was in the south, and therefore its softest, it carried with it not the breath of new-mown hay or the wondrous scent of clean, growing things, but the odor of the stockyards, which was not perfume. Nevertheless the urge that had wrought strangely on the nature of John Forsythe returned.

The third spring in the city smote him so hard—by that time he had fallen into routine somewhat and thus being more susceptible to exterior influences—that he was again forced to walk in the night to obtain relief. Haunting the parks, the illness that he felt sure was coming over him—sex psychology not having been among the subjects he had studied—gripped him harder than ever; for there—just as on the courthouse lawn in Unionville—he saw couples sitting closely together, holding hands and whispering. To escape these sights which fired his blood he fled down town.

South State Street at that time was brilliant in a tawdry way, as the fronts of the many saloons were decorated with strings and clusters of incandescent lights, most of them red, while numerous arc lights suspended in the doorways assisted in dispelling the gloom of the night. The unblocked entrances, the strident music of pianos which responded automatically to the insertion of nickels, the laughter of women, frankly shrieked a welcome; but John Forsythe hurried by.

He sped toward the elevated, his objective being the shelter of his room. Heedless of those blatant electrical invitations and the music and laughter, and walking as close to the curb as possible, for he could make better speed there, his thoughts were in such a whirl that he was partially blinded. For that reason he almost collided with a young woman who was getting out of a cab in front of one of the most brilliant drinking establishments.

"Hello, old sport," said a familiar voice; and John Forsythe, his flight arrested, recognized Marie Riggers, Marie Riggers with the same yellow hair, the same blue eyes, the same mocking smile, yet a new Marie Riggers in diamonds and furs.

"I knew you as soon as I laid eyes on you," she exclaimed, extending one of those gem burdened hands. Her escort, a youth in a light tan suit with cap and socks to match, stood well in the background and kept his face turned away. "How'd you happen to hit the big town? Don't be so darned bashful. Come on in, have a little drink with an old friend from Hickville, and tell me all about yourself."

Forsythe stood speechless. He sensed the change that had come over the girl, recognized the lack of something which, despite her forwardness, she had possessed in Unionville. He was afraid, frankly afraid of her.

In spite of himself, still silent, he backed away, and when some of those restless, impatient night pedestrians crowded between he turned and almost ran. Twice in one night he had had narrow escapes. In the future he would remain in his room safe with his studies. He wondered who the man was. In a way he had seemed familiar in the fleeting moment his eyes had strayed from those of Marie Riggers.

"I guess the sight of me will hold that rube for a while," she laughed as Forsythe fled. "Ramble along, Ralph; it's getting late."

"What the hell did you stop him for?" demanded Walters. "He certainly would have recognized me, and God knows I don't want to meet up with him again."

"What do you care? You really don't owe him anything. On the level, he's in your debt, and we might have found a chance to get back at him."

"Fat chance I'd have with John Forsythe."

The tone was aggrieved.

"Don't go straight up, Ralph. We might get a chance to put him on the hummer yet. And don't mope like that. You've got a face on you like a hearse, and here we were going to spend the rest of the night painting this man's town red."

The swinging doors closed behind them, and they took seats at a small table. The waiter spoke to them familiarly.

"Whisky," said Walters shortly.

"Make mine a beer, Fritz," Marie ordered. "I'm buying to-night, so there won't be any need of checks. We're celebrating. We certainly turned a good trick."

Walters, filling his glass level full each time, swallowed several drinks of potent red liquid in quick succession.

"What are you trying to do—get a snoot full right away?" demanded the observing Marie. "Cut out the booze for a while and let's dance."

"Don't feel like it. Another little nip, Fritz."

Marie gave a discreet signal, and the usually alert waiter was unheeding of the order.

"You are a live one, Ralph," she scolded. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

The floor was crowded with whirling figures, and the orchestra was earning its pay if noise was any criterion. That which was served by the hurrying, perspiring waiters was beginning to take effect on the consumers. The faces of the dancers were flushed.

Walters, seemingly studying that mass about him, did not answer Marie's question. Suddenly he dropped his head on his arms.

"Damn him!" he sobbed. "Damn him, damn him, damn him!"

"Brace up quick—you've got a crying jag," advised Marie sharply. "What have you got to be sniffling about, anyway? If it hadn't been for him you'd probably be clerking in a grocery store in a yap town

to-night. Instead you don't have to work; you've got good clothes; the old Lisle Thread National wouldn't hold another note without busting a garter, and you've got me."

"You're a good pal, Marie, but—"

"But what?"

"Let's get out of here. This place makes me sick."

"All right, if you feel that way. Fritz, call a cab."

"There's one right outside, Marie."

In the vehicle she looked at Walters with a queer glint in her eyes. For a few seconds she sat tense, a white line about her mouth. Then just as suddenly she shriveled and, throwing herself back in the seat, she sobbed violently.

"Oh, Ralph, why did he get you fired, and why did you come to Columbus?" she burst out suddenly. "Before that I was foolish, but I was decent. And it's all his fault, damn him!"

Walters drew her to him.

"Forgive me, Marie," he pleaded. "I was thinking of my—"

"And I was thinking of my mother, too," she groaned. "Oh, God—we're both bad, all bad, and it's his fault!"

The cab turned a corner suddenly, and the horses almost ran down a man who was crossing the street. The pedestrian was John Forsythe, but Marie Riggers and Ralph Walters, blinded by their grief, did not see him. Nor did he recognize the couple huddled in the corner of the cab.

It is doubtful if he would have identified them had they been in plain sight, for John Forsythe was guiding himself subconsciously. His mind was elsewhere. Forgotten were the adventures of only a short time before. He was going over ways and means of shortening the apprenticeship which must precede accomplishment.

CHAPTER XII.

"DID YOU DO IT?"

THE customers were the solution of the problem, John Forsythe decided as he hung his clothes in neat order in the little closet. Among them were men who could be of vast assistance, and by them he would climb. He had been acting on that premise, but he had not taken the full advantage. Before his eyes closed he had resolved to increase his efforts.

In the ensuing days he did so to such an extent that just as steadily as he had lost popularity with the other clerks as his loan business grew, just so steadily did he gain it with certain of the customers that did business with Fyske, Fyske & Browne.

These were a carefully selected list, certainly men who could in no manner be classed as squirrels, and to them he gave superservice. No favor was too great for him to extend, provided it cost him nothing and did not conflict with the rules of the firm. He was punctilious in observing those rules because he would take no chances on jeopardizing his progress even slightly.

One day he observed a new figure among those that sat in the chairs facing the blackboard. He was a skeleton of a man—a man whose face in John Forsythe's imagination was a death's head. The shiny skin, looking as if varnished, was drawn back sharply over prominent cheek bones; his mouth was a mere slit, apparently without lips, and his neck, from the base of which protruded an unhealthy swelling, was wrinkled like a piece of leather that had been exposed to heat. His hands were claws, long finger nails heightening the impression of talons. His clothing was untidy, and he was unshaven; but Mr. Browne, a few seconds after he came in, rushed from his office and greeted him effusively, a courtesy he extended to no other customer.

"Who is that?" asked Forsythe of Clearwater, the head bookkeeper.

"Faxon—Henry Faxon," replied Clearwater. "Ever since we opened he's taken spells of coming in here day after day for months at a time. He never makes a trade here, when he sits in that chair, but scatters his business all over town, so far as we can learn. That's so no one can follow him. All he does here is watch the board, but Mr. Browne believes his presence adds prestige to the firm because he's so well known. That's why he makes such a fuss over him."

"Rich?"

"Rich—millions and millions. Nobody knows how many. About five years ago the doctors told him he was going to die of tuberculosis. They gave him three months to live. Up to that time he had been only a little trader, but right then and there he expanded like a balloon. Now about every ninety days he gathers in a new fortune, and nobody knows anything about it until after the smoke has blown away. He has this whole town eating out of his hand. There are men over on Dearborn Street who would give a half million to have an hour's advance on one of his deals. I would myself. With that security I know where I could borrow it."

Forsythe dissembled the eagerness within him. He ached to unloose a torrent of questions that would lay bare every detail of the personality of Faxon. Here was the embodiment of his life dream not thirty feet away.

"Know anything more about him?" he asked as casually as possible when Clearwater showed no indications of proceeding.

"No, except that he has no kith or kin, so far as any one knows, though over his desk is the picture of a young man in uniform that looks something like him. He has a ratty old office about two blocks from here with an iron faced woman, probably his stenographer, as his watchdog. I saw her one day when, no one else being available, I took a note over for Mr. Browne.

"He doesn't go out to lunch, but brings apples with him and eats them here—eats them all except the seeds. You can't get acquainted with him either. Nobody can. He's got a shell like an oyster. That's all I know, and old Fyske is motioning for you."

"Mr. Forsythe, one of our very brightest young men, will look after you," purred the president, beaming and all but patting John Forsythe on the head.

Forsythe scarcely heard the order given him, his mind being so full of the startling facts in his possession. He executed it only mechanically but with his usual courtesy, and in return received a gruff "Thanks" from the customer.

He could not probe Clearwater further that day because of lack of opportunity, but in the succeeding days he asked adroit questions. Clearwater was anxious enough to accommodate, but could not do so. The bookkeeper had reasons for desiring to satisfy Forsythe, as Forsythe held his notes for an inconvenient sum, and the indications were that not only would he be forced to ask for an extension but would have to borrow even more.

Failing with Clearwater, Forsythe endeavored to bring himself to the attention of Faxon; but the old man always looked past or over him, his dead fish eyes betraying in no way that he had seen the clerk. Forsythe persisted, however, for Faxon became a fetish with him. But though the weeks ran into months and the months into more than a year, every business day of which Faxon was in his seat in the customers' room, Forsythe accomplished nothing.

Again and again feeling that he was wasting time in a useless endeavor, Forsythe was often on the point of giving up, but always he returned to his objective. Meanwhile he was not neglecting other visitors to the customers' room, and he made several friends, men of affairs who dropped in now and then to do a little quiet trading on margins—staid and respectable men of the city who did not go to the older houses because they did not wish their associates to know that they were taking flyers in the market.

These men saw in John Forsythe a keen-witted, quick thinking young man who could be depended on, and who did not do any unnecessary talking. Several learned the depth of his reticence by endeavoring to extract from him information relative to the inner workings of Fyske, Fyske & Browne. John Forsythe knew these inner workings, as he had reached a point where Mr. Browne voiced guarded hints as to the prospects of a small partnership when Forsythe had proved himself further. Though the probers failed to find that which they sought, their discouragement did not antagonize them. Instead, they respected John Forsythe for his shrewdness and loyalty.

And still the moving factor was far from being loyalty. It was nothing more nor less

than self-interest, as John Forsythe considered himself first and every one else second. He was a man now. His twenty-sixth birthday was past, and he felt that he had reached the point where he could begin the hunt at any time, his efforts in the past having been preliminary only to the real chase. The only restraint, the inhibition that kept him from leaving Fyske, Fyske & Browne, was the caution inherited from Josiah Forsythe.

He was losing nothing. Those friends he was making—friends who had several times imparted to him information of no little value—would be worth still more later. Fyske, Fyske & Browne were not the biggest firm in Chicago; and as his knowledge of the firm's affairs grew he realized that the practices of the house were dangerously near the line, so close that a hair was the only partition between legality and lawbreaking; but they brought in the money, and John Forsythe was satisfied.

In this new understanding he saw why the doddering, almost senile Reginald Fyske occupied the position of president, and why he was allowed to toddle about the office speaking to customers and patting the backs of clerks. He was there for the same reason as there was a display in front of Ben Johnson's store. Customer bait—that was it. His benevolent appearance, his trim white beard, his conservative, gold rimmed spectacles, gave an air of respectability to the establishment, the air of respectability that Fyske, Fyske & Browne needed.

John Forsythe was prospering. The number of employees of Fyske, Fyske & Browne was increasing constantly, and with the increase in the number of names on the pay roll new customers were added to his loan business. His rates, however, remained as they had always been. In time he accumulated a surplus which he invested in first class securities—securities recommended by Mr. Browne himself. This was part of Forsythe's strategy. From the day he had placed his personal check in Browne's hands Browne treated him more as an equal and on several occasions discussed matters of policy with him, ignoring completely the spectacled, gray head, and the bundle of human energy associated with him.

"Old Fyske's in his dotage and Tommy's nothing but a jumping jack," Browne observed one afternoon when he and Forsythe were alone in the private office. "They're both useful, however, even if they are only scenery. You stick to me and—"

John Forsythe's heart jumped. Though the sentence was uncompleted, he recognized a definite promise, a promise by a kindred soul.

"I'm not promising anything," continued Browne as though he had read the thought. "But you keep your ear clamped to the ground and every time you're tempted to talk sew a button on your mouth."

Browne closed his large, white teeth on his cigar in a manner suggesting a period to that sentence.

"I've been watching you," he went on after a slight pause. "I know about your loan business, but that's your own affair. If those damned fools out there can't take care of themselves, I don't feel called upon to look after them."

Instead of replying, Forsythe looked his employer in the eye. If he was seeking admissions, he would be disappointed.

Browne met the look and laughed. "I'm not trying to get anything on you," he said, still chuckling. "Old Reggy Fyske might cut up rough if he knew what you were doing, but he couldn't see even with another pair of specs, and besides I can handle him. As for Tom, all he can see is the day's business. He doesn't even know that next week's coming."

Forsythe was on the point of replying that he had perceived that himself a long time ago; but having been told to sew a button on his mouth when he felt like talking, he applied the needle at once. He was certain, however, that Browne knew that he was telling him nothing other than what he had learned by his own observations.

From that time on John Forsythe threw himself into the business with a new intensity, calling in some of his loans that he might give more time to Fyske, Fyske & Browne. Visions of collaborating with Browne when he was in actual control did not dazzle him to such an extent that he neglected detail. The only time he took

for himself during business hours was that which he used in further endeavors to break through the shell of Henry Faxon.

"You're coming, my boy, you're coming," said the elder Fyske, removing his hands from under his coat tails and patting Forsythe's back. "Some day you will be my partner if you keep up this pace. I told you that if you would stick to me you would grow up with the firm. And my firm is growing, and I have great plans for the future, my boy. Work hard, like I have taught you, and you will be a success with me."

Forsythe wanted to laugh. To him there was good comedy in this pompous egotism, but it irritated him a trifle as he had to stifle a desire to strike through the bombast. But on the whole he was happy and content. In a few years he would attain, or at least be very close to, his goal. It was a thought that he loved to fondle in his mind. He walked across the floor and in his abstraction almost collided with a customer. It was Faxon.

A hint of a grim smile came over Faxon's face as Forsythe apologized, but he gave no other sign that he recognized him as a sentient being.

Clearwater was watching the proceeding.

"Hell's going to pop to-day for sure," he said, a tenseness in his words. "Wish I knew which way the cat was going to jump. I'd be rich by night. The last time old frozen face looked that near human there were six failures and two suicides, but he came out a half million to the good."

Hell did pop, the explosion being almost coincident with the conclusion of Clearwater's prediction. A sudden silence hushed the room, the blackboard boys stopping their scribbling with the chalk still in air; the tickers stuttering to a stop. Then there was a wild clattering of telegraph instruments, as though the wires were bursting with that which they carried, and then the tickers resumed their staccato statements.

Men crowded about the tape and the bulletin board, all restraint gone. Some went white suddenly; some laughed. One big fellow pounded a smaller man on the back, the little man standing pale and tense, insensible to the beating, mouthing the name of God over and over. With every tick of the clock he was growing richer.

In the frenzy of work that was thrust upon him in the mad rush to save or gain, Forsythe stole a second that he might glance at Faxon. He was sitting in his chair, skinny hands clasped over sharp knees, his body immobile, his parchment-like skin drawn tightly over his cheek bones, his mouth a straight line, and his fishlike eyes as dead as ever. Apparently his handiwork brought him no reactions.

Thus he sat until the market closed. Then he arose and stalked out of the room just as he had done day after day, week after week. But this time he left almost an hour earlier than usual. This was only a minor popping of the infernal regions, and as nearly as could be estimated he was only a quarter of a million dollars the richer.

A quarter of a million dollars! The summit of John Forsythe's ambition. Maybe even more than that, Forsythe's information as to the total having traveled a roundabout path. And this old man with the death's-head had the key to the treasure chest!

Faxon was in his place the next day, his exterior the same, his crustiness just as manifest. Forsythe looked at him with curious eyes—stared at him, in fact—but Faxon's eyes did not stray from the blackboard, though Forsythe, with all the force of will at command, sought to make him glance his way.

"If he'd only confide in me just once I'd—" sighed Clearwater.

"Will you be able to pay me to-day?" interrupted Forsythe. "Your note is past due and unless you settle I'll have to garnishee you."

Clearwater paled. He had come out of the inclosure and was standing near the chairs. It was after closing time and all the customers had gone except Faxon, who was studying the blackboard. He often waited until he was alone to do this, seemingly mapping out his campaign from the mass of hieroglyphics. Both Forsythe and Clearwater forgot him.

"For the love of God, don't do that!" pleaded the bookkeeper. "I've got a sick kid at the house, and my wife is almost

crazy. My expenses have been something awful. If you clamp down on me I'm gone. Give me another week, and I'll pay in full. Ronalds said he would let me in on a deal that would more than clear me."

"The date on that note is plain, and you can read," replied Forsythe coldly. "You either pay me to-day or I'll file my claim."

"You know what will happen to me then."

"What difference does that make to me?"

"None to you, but everything to me. It means I will be discharged, and I'll have the devil's own time finding another place without a recommendation. It means my family will be thrown out of our flat and the kid will die. Show that you are human and give me seven days more! I'll pay you double interest."

"No," answered Forsythe impassively.

He knew to the dollar the salary earned by the bookkeeper, and also the exemption the law allowed married men. Clearwater had reached the limit.

"You pay me before you leave to-night or take the consequences," he added.

The bookkeeper begged, but Forsythe was obdurate. Family troubles were not as significant to him as his bank account. Trembling, Clearwater put on his coat and went out. Forsythe knew his errand—he would seek a loan elsewhere. If he succeeded, well and good. If not—the law protected creditors.

The hands of the clock swept the dial slowly and Forsythe closed his day's work. Faxon still sat in his chair, his cold eyes on the blackboard, his skinny hands over his sharp knees. Forsythe noticed him and wondered why he stayed so long after his usual leaving time. But Faxon was privileged, and if necessary the office would be kept open to suit his convenience.

Clearwater, aged in the brief interval of absence, crept in and went to his books without a word. Forsythe smiled. Clearwater was in Browne's confidence even more than he, and with Clearwater gone—

He stepped over to the desk.

"Can you pay me?"

"No," was the listless answer.

Forsythe glanced at the clock. He would just have time to obtain the garnishee before the courts closed. In twenty minutes he was back in his place.

"Did you do it?" asked Clearwater, perspiration dotting his forehead.

"Yes," answered Forsythe, busying himself with the papers on his desk.

Clearwater turned to his ledger. The office was silent. Suddenly an ink blot marred the neat page.

"How long have you been with this firm?" asked a voice, and Forsythe looked up almost startled.

Faxon was standing at the rail!

"I am in my fourth year now, sir," answered Forsythe steadily, though a humming sounded in his brain.

Faxon did not answer, but strode out.

"I've won, I've won!" chanted something in Forsythe's being and this chanting continued until he heard the tinkle of glass, followed by the sound of something soft slithering to the floor and a thump as a hard object came in contact with the boards.

The high stool of Clearwater was empty.

Beside his body was a bottle, a bottle, yet large enough to hold the potent liquid to destroy a human life.

John Forsythe had lost his first loan.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRAPPED!

THE investigation set in progress by Thomas Fyske as soon as the body of Clearwater was removed relieved John Forsythe of any apparent connection with the death of the bookkeeper. Irregularities were found in Clearwater's accounts. The peculations covered a period of months, though the total amount taken was a little less than five hundred dollars.

Forsythe contributed to the collection for flowers—he couldn't do otherwise and save his face as the elder Fyske attended to the matter personally—though he regretted the dollar he was forced to donate. Clearwater had cheated him and there was absolutely no recourse. To the bookkeeper's wife and child he gave not the slightest thought.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" mouthed the venerable Fyske, working his hands beneath

his coat tails. "But a warning, gentlemen, a warning! 'The wages of sin,' you know."

"We ought to do something for the family, they're in hard shape," said the younger Fyske when the three members of the firm were in conference. "I hope the papers won't get hold of this; it might hurt our business."

"The papers will hear of it, of course, through the coroner," said Browne. "But I'll handle the newspaper men."

"We ought to help the family," parroted the elder Fyske. "Put me down for five and Tommy for the same amount."

Browne looked at both of them, surprise in his eyes.

"Let's make it in the name of the firm. You're going pretty strong," he exclaimed.

"Why, five dollars apiece isn't too much," responded the president, beaming benevolently. "There's the widow and the invalid child, you know."

"Hell, I thought you meant five thousand!" exploded Browne. "We'll keep our mouths shut as to the shortage and announce our subscription as five thousand dollars."

"But—but—but—but that's outrageous!" stammered the elderly Fyske.

"No 'buts' about it. I'm not getting soft. This is a matter of business. Those reporters are keen. We've got to disarm them. If this gets out it will break us because the papers will exaggerate and every man who repeats the story will magnify our loss. If there is even a rumor of a shortage —well, you know the banks and our customers. They are as timid as a lot of rabbits.

"But when I tell the boys from the press we are giving Clearwater's family five thousand dollars they'll never dream of a shortage. It won't be money thrown away either. The return will come in advertising. We'll get space we couldn't buy in any other way."

"Charity is a wondrous thing," orated old Fyske, "Faith, Hope, and Charity and the greatest of these is—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Browne. "Forget the cant and get down to business. We're hypocrites and no matter what we may want the world to believe we needn't try to hide it from one another. I'll make out the check right away. The widow no doubt will appreciate the cash. Get out and tell Forsythe I want to see him at once."

Forsythe responded almost instantly. He had been standing close enough to the door to hear the entire conversation, but the two Fyskes did not notice this.

"How much did Clearwater owe you?" Browne demanded.

"Seventy-five dollars."

"You garnisheed him?"

"Yes."

"When he died you lost your only security, his job?"

"Yes."

"You stop service instantly and withdraw all proceedings."

"I did that the first thing this morning."

"Good. Sit tight and keep your mouth shut. You're not as much loser as we are. But keep closed up about that also."

Forsythe promised.

A little later Browne, with great detail and in a quiet way that carried conviction, told how the bookkeeper had been worried over the illness of his child and the health of his wife and assured the newspaper men who had been admitted to his private office immediately on their arrival that a thorough investigation had shown the bookkeeper's accounts correct in every detail.

"That investigation was really an injustice to the boy," continued Browne, "but we thought it well to protect his name as well as ourselves. He was one of our most valuable employees, having been with us ever since we started. We felt so badly over the unfortunate affair that we have done a little something for the family. We are just like a family here; the grief of one is the grief of all."

Browne stopped. The questions he had anticipated were put, and though he apparently attempted to evade them, he admitted finally with a great show of reluctance that a five thousand dollar check was on its way to the Clearwater home at that very moment. As he had foreseen, the pictures of Clearwater, his wife and little daughter were in several of the afternoon papers and references to the firm's generosity in every one.

This lesson in practical publicity was not lost on John Forsythe, though he was exulting over the good luck that had followed his misfortune due to Clearwater's death. When Faxon came in the next morning he actually nodded to John Forsythe and with that nod Forsythe's standing with the customers of Fyske, Fyske and Brown was heightened a thousandfold. With the blind confidence of patrons of such establishments they interpreted it as a friendship with a man who could manipulate the market.

Forsythe worked as usual that day, despite interruptions, which were many, by those who sought him out because of Faxon's nod. Forsythe, however, never presumed on the advance made to him by the man with the death's head. So much was at stake, the risk of making an error was so great, that he took every precaution to hold himself to the place assigned to him by Faxon for so many months. He would wait. He had been successful so far through that method and he purposed following it to the end.

The day was over at last—it was one of longest in John Forsythe's career—and Faxon sat alone studying the blackboard. Forsythe invented little tasks for himself and was still busy when the two Fyskes went out together. A few minutes later Browne pulled down his rolltop desk with the customary bang and left with a growled "good-by." Then Faxon came up to the railing.

"Meet me in my office after business hours to-morrow," he said and stalked out stiffly.

The room whirled, and Forsythe with it, but he steadied himself enough to signify assent to the order, though he had great difficulty in finding his voice.

Forsythe boarded the Elevated with his brain fired by his thoughts. The whole thing was so big that he could not comprehend it in detail. He was closing in on his quarry, closing in more and more rapidly. He wanted to be alone in his room as soon as possible, as he could think better there.

When success, as judged by Unionville standards, had come to him that small city, he had retained his little room in Mrs. Smith's. It was the same in Chicago. He could read, study and sleep inclosed by those four walls and the cost was but six dollars a week. It did not take a large room to serve as an incubator for his plan of life and every dollar expended uselessly was a dollar lost.

He stopped at the restaurant near his home where he always ate his morning and evening meals because the food was cheaper and the portions larger than elsewhere in the neighborhood, though the tablecloth was spotted. Sitting down in his usual chair he ordered roast beef. Bread, butter, vegetables and coffee were included in the cost of the roast and it was not necessary to specify them. His elation was such that he ordered a dessert also, though the extra cost was a dime.

This was something so out of the ordinary that Maude, the waitress, whom he had tipped five cents regularly ever since she had taught him that a gratuity was a part of the penalty of a restaurant meal in Chicago, was moved to question him. Maude had an interest in Forsythe's welfare of which he was absolutely ignorant.

"Didya get a raise?" she asked, her hand on the back of his chair.

More than mere curiosity was in that question. Maude, a romantic young person with a not unpleasing exterior, had dreamed dreams and was dreaming at that very moment. These visions did not embody days spent in tramping to the kitchen with arms laden heavily with dirty dishes and tramping back again with dishes more or less clean.

Instead of this, she saw a home of her own, a home wherein evenings, sat a man comfortable in his stocking feet, his pipe going nicely and the evening paper close at hand. This man was not Max, the chef, her devoted slave, but John Forsythe, and therein lay her interest in his welfare.

Forsythe's ignorance of this was due to the fact that Maude, for professional reasons, treated all of her customers alike, though when she was near John Forsythe her impulse was to rumple his hair and to call him pet names. She had difficulty in talking to him her heart pounded so hard—all of which she confessed in even greater

detail to her tried and true friend Madge, who had the tables next to hers.

The tenderest cuts went to Forsythe also, for Max had dreams, too, and was hopeful though scorned time after time.

Forsythe laughed at Maude's question.

"No, but I put over a good deal to-day, a big deal," he answered, and then bent over his meal.

Knowing that he was employed in a broker's office she naturally associated the word "deal" with stocks rather than an appointment with an old man with a death's head. She was elated correspondingly as she had read of the unbelievable sums associated with "deals in stocks." If he only would ask her for a date! She had slapped men, even good tipping ones, for less than that, but John Forsythe was different.

But John Forsythe didn't. Instead in the excess of his happiness he gave her a dime, pressing it into her hand. Maude interpreted this as an act of sentiment—when she told Madge about it—but it was merely Forsythe's precaution with money. A slattern sometimes assisted in clearing away the soiled china or stone or whatever the heavy table service was and he feared she might find and keep that which was rightfully Maude's.

At peace with himself, Forsythe strolled briskly across Lake Street and made his way to his room. Night had fallen and, as usual the stairway was dark, for the landlady was economical. He did not mind this as he had traveled that route so long he knew every inch of it. Feeling his way along the equally dark upper hall he unlocked the door of his room, his hand automatically going to the switch, and the incandescent glowed.

And there seated comfortably in his rocking chair clad in a light silk kimono was Marie Riggers!

"Hello, old-timer," she greeted easily. "Got a kiss for your honey?"

Forsythe could not reply. Why was she there? What did she intend to do? Not for a moment did he think that she was throwing herself at him. A horrible suspicion caused cold sweat to break out on his body. She who was capable of anything had it in her power to ruin him utterly.

"Bad boy to come home to his little girl so late," she purred, rising. If he hadn't dodged quickly she would have thrown her arms about him.

"What do you want?" Forsythe croaked. "What are you doing here in my room? How did you find me?" The questions fairly tumbled from his lips.

"The last one first," she retorted, her face flushed. "I found you by a lucky accident. I had to get away from down town for a while and a friend of mine I used to know in Unionville, a traveling man named Frost, recommended this place. I saw you when you went out yesterday morning and when you came back. I knew you would be here at the same time to-night because you keep regular hours.

"The answer to the other two questions is now ready. It's the same for both—I came here to make trouble for you. I've got you right where I want you now. Suppose I am found in here, what will it mean to you? I know the firm you are with.

"And that isn't all. Suppose I make a disturbance and the landlady comes up? She runs a respectable place and she'll throw you out. There would be loud talk—I would attend to that—and an officer might drop in and the newspapers would have a piece.

"That would be bad enough, but suppose my husband should be watching me and should follow me up here—we room right below you. There would be a scene and a little later a suit for alienation of affections with plenty of witnesses for him because he would start a fight and the other roomers would come flocking in here and find me."

Perspiration covered Forsythe's body, though he was shivering with cold. His knees wanted to bend. The whole structure of years was in peril. And to-morrow he had an appointment with Henry Faxon!

"How much do you want?" he rasped at last, a curious sensation of ice rubbed up and down his spine, overcoming him.

"Ten thousand dollars."

"You're crazy!"

She flung herself on him, her arms about his neck, her lips firm against his. The suddenness of the onslaught took him so unawares it was impossible to escape.

Then there was a blinding, dazzling light.

When the glare left his aching eyes and he could see again, through the thick smoke he recognized Ralph Walters with a camera.

"Is it possible now?" demanded Marie Riggers triumphantly. She seated herself comfortably, drew a cigarette from her stocking, lighted it and smoked easily as she rocked back and forth.

Forsythe sprang toward the camera, only to be stopped by something shiny in the hand of Walters.

Then John Forsythe, at bay, bargained and into his bargaining put all his skill as a trader, addressing himself to Marie and ignoring Walters as of no consequence. But she was unalterable in her purpose, and at last he was driven to offer two thousand five hundred dollars payable in cash as soon as the bank opened the next day.

Marie looked toward Walters, and he nodded, relief in his face.

"Well, our little party is over," she smiled as Walters replaced the revolver in his pocket and gathered up the tripod of the camera. "A pleasant time was had by all—except little Johnny Forsythe, who paid dear for one small kiss. Ralphie and Marie will now toddle along and dream of the fortune to-morrow is going to bring us. Nighty, night, generous little Johnny Forsythe."

She blew a kiss from the tips of her fingers.

"Long distance and free," she exclaimed.

"No," answered Forsythe firmly. "You'll sit right here until to-morrow, unless you want to leave that camera with me and I don't think you do. Do you imagine I'm fool enough to let you get out of here with that so you can develop the negative and make prints to hold over me for more money after I pay you for the plate? You've put one over on me, but you'll deliver the goods."

Walters looked at Marie and dropped into a chair. She seated herself on the bed. While the long hours dragged by monotonously the two obviously fought sleep. Throughout the night, whenever she or Walters looked up, they met the stare of the wide open eyes of John Forsythe. Money was involved and he was not even drowsy.

In his mind, as the hours stretched into centuries, he went over plan after plan to get possession of that black box with its damning contents, but nothing feasible presented itself. Stronger than Walters, he could leap on him and wrest the camera from him, but, as Marie had said, any disturbance would bring the other roomers like a swarm of bees. What she had told him was true—he had seen it himself whenever the inevitable squabbles of married couples in furnished rooms reached the point where physical force replaced recriminations; the scream of a woman, no matter what the hour, was the signal for a running through halls and a gathering before a door.

Exposure would be certain. He might be able to destroy the camera, but the fragments would remain—also Marie Riggers and he would not be able to explain her, especially as Walters would substantiate any story she might tell. He was caught helplessly in a closely woven web and all that he could do was to remain on watch and thus keep his two unwelcome guests from leaving the room until they went with him. With that picture safely in his possession he would be free from the danger that had overpowered him.

Nor would he be a victim again. He would be on his guard continually. The lock on the door would be changed at once. He was a fool for not having done that before—it was only a cheap affair that any key would turn. But he had never kept *anything valuable enough in the room* to justify the expense. He had never dreamed that his reputation was something that had to be guarded by bolts.

Marie Riggers was the brains of this plot—damn her! That squirrel of a Walters did not have mentality enough to think it out in such detail. She was a clever woman. Why hadn't he had the sense to make friends with her back in Unionville? Buggy rides—at Burchard's prices—would have been cheap compared to what he had to pay now.

Perhaps he could do something at the bank—it would not be too late to wreck the plot then. The schemes that flitted through his head were rejected as wild and impossible. He was sick in his soul. Two thou-

sand five hundred dollars! The sum would not impoverish him, but it was money expended for something that would not bring a tangible return. Nothing could be done—he would have to submit to this blackmail. Any untoward move he mght make would only involve him more deeply. Luckily he had called in enough loans so this amount was available at the bank.

They would squander the dollars he had accumulated by such hard work and sacrifice! The thought nauseated him still more.

The haggard trio left the house shortly after eight o'clock the next morning, Forsythe not daring to shave for fear they would take advantage of the slightest relaxation in his vigilance.

Without speaking the three rode down on the Elevated. Together they went to the cage of the paying teller who knew Forsythe well, and at this window Forsythe filled out a counter check asking that the money be paid in large bills. Outside he handed these to Marie Riggers and Walters gave him the camera. Then John Forsythe breathed normally once more.

"Get out of my sight before I call the police," he commanded, and in spite of themselves, Marie and Ralph slunk away.

Forsythe ran toward the offices of Fyske, Fyske & Browne. If he was not delayed he would have time to shave and make himself presentable before business opened for the day.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SHOCK FOR FORSYTHE.

A SHORT distance from the bank Marie recovered her poise and slipped her arm through Ralph's.

"We've won!" she exulted. "He's paid us at least a part of the debt he owes us. Two thousand five hundred seeds—I'll bet there's a drop of his heart's blood on every dollar."

Walters did not reply. A strange look was in his eyes. He turned toward the lake.

"Where do you think you're going, Ralph?" demanded the girl, shaking his arm. "Pull down your vest; you're walking in your sleep."

"I want to think. Let's go to a place a little more quiet. Somewhere we can see trees and grass. I'm dirty sick of these pavements."

Through State Street crowds they walked; crossed Wabash Avenue; found their way through Michigan Boulevard's maze of wheels, among which were occasional automobiles, and finally sat down on a bench in Grant Park. All the way Walters was silent.

Marie was also. She could not understand what had come over her companion. Now that they had attained their objective she expected a wild celebration. But with the biggest stake they had ever won safe in her possession, he was gloomy and abstracted. Apprehensively she felt the bulge in her stocking. It was still there, and in her mind she could see the two one thousand and the five one hundred dollar bills.

"A drink would perk you up, Ralph," she said at last. "You're all in from sitting up all night. I'm not feeling right pert myself."

"Not just now, Marie."

Something in his tone made her look at him sharply.

"Worrying about a comeback, old pal?" she asked, slipping her arm through his and patting his hand. "Well, get it off your chest. There can't anything happen; we've sewed him up too tight. You can bet that when John Forsythe lets loose of any of his coin he's beat and beat good."

Walters looked out over the lake.

"Come on now, be a good sport," the girl insisted. "Let's go over to Tony's, tip over a couple of high ones and then hit the hay until to-night. And to-night—man, we'll put some red into the color of this burg then. Why, we've got a fortune and it only took us one night to get it. And we've trimmed that loan shark good and we're both clean."

"Are we, Marie?" asked Walters, a tenseness in his voice.

"Certainly. As I said, there can't be a comeback. Forsythe hasn't a thing on us even if he should squawk. I'd like to see his face when he opens that camera and finds it empty. That was a swell touch, Ralph, old boy. That picture was the finishing

blow, the real knockout. You can credit yourself with one win at least from John Forsythe."

"That wasn't what I meant, Marie."

"What did you mean, then?" she asked curiously. "Sometimes I can't make you out, Ralph. And you make me feel funny when you act like that. Come on now, cut it out and explain—I'm getting the willies."

Walters opened his mouth several times, but no words came. To aid him the girl put her arm around him in the same motherly protecting manner she had shown when guiding him through traffic.

"Marie, will you marry me?" he blurted at last.

The question or the suddenness of it dazed her. The color left her face.

"Marry you?" she asked in turn, her voice strained.

Walters nodded.

Then, there on the lake front with the Illinois Central trains fretting in the yards, the smoke of the engines disfiguring the air, she dropped her blond head into his lap and great sobs shook and tore her body. But her fingers clasped his.

"I mean it, Marie," Walters whispered awkwardly. "Not because I think I ought to, but because I care for you. You were a good pal to me when John Forsythe put me down and out and you've been a good pal ever since. But, Marie, I'm sick of it all, the cafés, the waiters, the women, the men—everything. I want the green grass, the blue sky, the old maples over the walks—"

Marie Riggers raised her face. The hardness was gone and in its place renunciation.

"Then you go back to the country, Ralph," she said painfully. "I can't, I'm too"—she continued with evident effort—"dirty. I'll never be clean again. You can do it, but it's different with a woman."

"If I can, you can."

"No, no, no," she sobbed, her tears melting her into a new tenderness. "I want the grass and the sky and—"

She crumpled in his arms and raising her face, he saw a new light in her eyes.

For a few minutes they sat silent, a strange world before them.

"Now that we're going straight, do you think we ought to give Forsythe's money back?" he inquired.

She pondered the question a few seconds and when she spoke her words had the snap of decision.

"No, I don't. He turned us into the way we went, you directly and me indirectly, and he should give us a new start."

Again that silence.

"The first thing I want to do is to send a money order to Mrs. Smith," said Walters, apparently dismissing the subject of Forsythe. "I ran away owing her fifteen dollars, you know, and she's a widow. I never thought of that before. I will pay Burchard also and he'll withdraw that warrant I heard he got for me. And then Marie"—careless of passers-by he drew her to him—"let's go to Texas. I've got an uncle down there. He owns the general store in one of those funny little towns—he sent me a post card showing Main Street full of wagon loads of cotton and he'll give me a job. We'll get a little house—"

"With vines all over the front porch and a big flower bed by the front walk! Oh, Ralph, I've lain awake nights thinking of a place like that. Ralph, I've never had a real home. I've had to make my living ever since I was thirteen years old. And you'll work hard and I'll save and some day you'll have enough money to go into business for yourself. We've learned our lesson, haven't we?"

Walters squeezed her hand with a pressure that brought pain, but her quick tears were those of happiness. After more argument he persuaded her to take his arm and they went to the office of the county clerk. A little later an obliging justice of the peace made them husband and wife.

Then they hastened out to Paulina Street to claim their belongings. Their small amount of packing completed, Walters looked about the room to see that nothing had been left behind. Packages in the waste paper basket caught his eye.

"Why, Marie," he exclaimed, "you've thrown away your cigarettes—here are two full packages."

"I have. I'm through with them. I'll never smoke again."

Impulsively he put his arm around her.

"Marie, shall we?" he asked gently.

"Yes," she answered softly, a flush on her face. "And, oh, Ralph, I'm so glad you asked me before we left here. I wanted to so much but I was waiting for you. It seems different now that we are married.

"I'll sell my rings—they're mine honestly; I bought them with money earned trimming hats, and we'll make a clean start."

That was the reason why, when a distressed John Forsythe hurried home with a new lock at the lunch hour, he found a small bundle on the table in his room. In it were two one thousand and five one hundred dollar bills and a note which read:

> We don't want your dirty money. We're clean from now on.

While John Forsythe was pondering over this, wonderfully elated over his good fortune, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Walters, who had signed the communication, were speeding southward toward a new life into which John Forsythe would never enter.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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WHERE DOES THE LAUGHTER GO?

WHERE does all the laughter go,
When it stays so long away?
Music we knew and we loved so well—
Where does it ripple and ring and swell?
Where does it start and stray?

Where does all the laughter go,
When we seek and find it not?
Laughter is sweet—and the world needs it so!
Weary are we of our tears and woe,
Yearning for joys forgot.

Where does all the laughter go?
Why, where little children play!
Deep in that cradle—behind yon door—
Dancing about on the sunlit floor—
There laughter lurks for aye.

Where does all the laughter go—
All the tinkling coins of mirth?
Listen! Each child that is born, I'm told,
Catches a heap in a horn of gold
Bringing it back to earth.

Where does all the laughter go?
Do you dread to lose its cheer?
Keep then your child heart, simple, strong—
Locks may turn white and the years wax long,
Yet you will hold it here!

Marion Short.



Socker Dooley Leaves the Fringe

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

FRINGE.

At best, if we come right down to cases, it is but a softer word for the description of the ragged edge. Life has its fringe. In it you will find the derelicts which time's passing has thrust so repeatedly aside that they find rest only on the outer edges where the requirements are lesser.

Life itself is aptly called a whirl; the whirl of events creates a centrifugal force that inevitably forces the weaker livers to the outer edge, the ragged edge—the fringe. The fight game is the same as any other in this respect. Taking the ring itself as the center of things, you will discover that the farther one gets away from it the less part they play in its affairs. Right up close on "fight nights" are the ringside boys. They dig well into the leg woolens and fetch forth the necessary fancy price. And the farther you walk from the ring the nearer the fringe you get. 'Way back are the half dollar enthusiasts. These gentlemen are willing to cough up a greater percentage of their earnings than the ringsider because they have a deeper affection for the game; ergo, why would they be content to gaze upon it through banks of rank tobacco smoke?

But you get the idea—the fight game is a whirl, just like the rest of life, and certain things are required in order to resist the centrifugal force that is ever trying to crowd one out where the circle is wider and the desirability therefore less. It's as true of the fighters as of the spectators.

'Way back, lined against the farthest wall from the ring, behind even the fifty cent lads, is the real fringe of the ring. It is

constituted of men who started right in the squared circle itself, started by fighting. Dependent upon the power of their fists and a fair break in the luck, they held the spotlight fleetingly. As the fists or the luck weakened, the ceaseless pressure of the whirl crowded them ever outward.

Right out of the ring they went, down into the ringside seats. Then back another tier of rows as merciless fate demonstrated their unfitness to stand the financial gaff. Ultimately they pass even the fifty cent tier and become only hazy faced memories that prompt promoters to admit them free to the space against the walls.

That's the ring fringe. Some time when you enter a fight club cast a thoughtful eye along the fringe. There isn't any better way to gauge the idiosyncrasies of life. Many a wise father has led his son who aspires to pugilistic glory silently along the fringe. It has had the desired results. After a good look the lad is apt to change his mind.

And to the lad who, momentarily, occupies the center of the gyroscope this fringe is not unknown. It usually costs him money after he has collected his end, but it never seems to point out to him the irresistible urge which will land him there sooner or later, if he fails to save while making.

All of which is related for the sole purpose of locating in your mind the standing in life maintained by the redoubtable Socker Dooley. He was of the fringe. Better, he was the fringe; his cuffs, both on trousers and coat, attested the fact indisputably. Yet only a few short years ago he had held the center of the ring so long that folks had begun to think him as immune to the gyroscopic action as to the wallops that slipped off his hard head like duck feathers slide under water.

And in the case of Socker, while they had destroyed his sense of shame, fettered him with the shackles of adversity, stung him with the shafts of forgetfulness, they had not impaired his recollections of the man he used to be. Not for a minute. He had small use for the youngsters of the day who happened to be "flush" because the ring could boast no men like the "old timers." Not Socker. He knew them for lemon merchants and longed wearily for a return of "jus' *half* de ol' stuff!"

In fact, if we may be permitted a psychological expression, it is a similar line of thought among other has-beens that keeps the members of the fringe alive. And the ability to express their thoughts and criticisms is certainly what keeps the fringe intact. And what thoughts and criticisms find expression! Some day, and we hope soon, some truly wise newspaper fight expert is going to view a set of bouts from the fringe and keep his ears open. Then he will write an article that describes a fight as it was fought. Don't get the erroneous idea that the fringe don't know what is going on in the ring!

One more tip, then on with the story. When you slip unobtrusively into the fringe, manage to do so near the entrance through which will pass the fighters on their way to the ring. Note the look that is cast upon the fringe. Read in the eyes and the swelling chest the sense of superiority; listen to the cagy remarks that are passed as the youth strides down the aisle through the smoke, get the craning of necks in the fringe as envious eyes follow each stride into the area of action. If that newspaper expert is half a writer, he will read in those eyes a longing, a wistful recollection that is convertible into as touching a tale as ever sprung from the pen of a sob sister.

And that brings us to the matter in hand. "Dink" Murphy was "on" at the home of action that night, and Socker Dooley had found his way into the fringe. Dink was young, Socker was old, as ring years go. Dink was a "comer," Socker a "has-been." Dink was perfectly convinced that never in the annals of the game was there a fighter to be classed with himself; Socker knew equally as well that in his day he would take such as Dink after each meal. Quite a difference of opinion, in a land where one wallop makes or loses a fortune.

Dink came through the fringe like an admiral at hammock inspection. Fate guided his footsteps to what appeared to be an opening beside Socker Dooley. It is easy to see that looking down an aisle into the ring is much more to be desired than

gazing at the backs of the fifty centers, which accounts for Socker's being at the end of the aisle. Like a conquering hero Dink seized Socker by the arm and thrust him aside.

"How d'ye git dat way, yuh towel swinging bucket hound?" demanded Socker. And then he shoved back strenuously. Could he permit these men about him to think that Socker Dooley feared a semi-windup artist? And could Dink permit them to get an idea that a has-been like Dooley could get away with that shove? Not in a land where that one wallop means everything.

"Git outa me way, yuh bum," countered Dink. "I t'ought dey locked up de old men's home at nine uh clock!" Bitter, bitter words to the ears of him who ruled supreme in his day. And bitter words, too, with an impersonal but deep sting to those others of the fringe who witnessed the tableau. In an instant these made a circle about the two men and prayed that Socker might retaliate for the insult they all felt.

And Socker did. He—well, Dink's manager, who wasn't three feet away when the thing happened, claims that Socker hit Dink hard enough to knock him "so cockeyed he was peekin' out from behind his own ears." They gathered Dink up and toted him out to his dressing room. The ringside boys began clamoring for their dividends of death and the general plans of the evening seemed on the verge of going askew irreparably.

When they got Dink back in the land of reality they asked him how he felt.

"Queer's 'ell," was his reply, with no dissenting votes.

"Kin yuh go on, Dink?" asked the manager specimen.

"Kid," says Dink thoughtfully, "if ut's all de same ter you an' de customers, I t'ink I'll take me rest period about now!"

"Damn dis guy Dooley!" blustered the manager. "Of all de"—then he saw Socker gazing at him from the doorway and thought better of the words he was embarking upon—"wallops I ever seen, he's got de sweetest. My hat's off ter him!" And in the eyes of the venerable Socker there glowed a light long dormant.

The promoter burst into the room with the air of one demented. With eyes distended he heard the tale of the wallop that had ruined his semi-windup. Then:

"Who was it socked this piece of bric-à-brac? Why the hell didn't you bring him here wrapped in excelsior?"

"Dooley sloughed him," vouchsafed the crestfallen manager.

"Dooley who?"

"Socker Dooley!"

"Soak me! Socker Dooley! I sat on my father's shoulder to watch his last fight, and here he is spreading my semifinal all over the clubhouse!"

The promoter was faced by a very acute problem. He had a semifinal to fix in a matter of minutes. Looking about him, he saw many familiar faces that he had permitted to slip by the gate to constitute the fringe.

"Who's here that can give Cohen a fight?" he demanded. "Some of you guys slide out into the hall and see who's sitting around. Maybe Spike Dillon or Tommy Craft will go on as a sub."

But search was useless. There was no one in the hall who seemed to answer the purpose. The promoter tried vainly to induce Dink to go on. His efforts elicited only a rueful rubbing of the injured chin and a cautious assurance to the effect that Socker Dooley "had de most emphasis in his right mitt of any guy in de world."

Cohen's manager burst upon the scene with angry demands for an explanation of the delay. He saw Dink cringing on the table.

"Yellow, eh? Well, I thought we was gonna get you into a ring this time, but I see I was wrong. What's the idee? Tryin' to kid us into dressin' for nothin'? Come on out an' fight like a man. How about our end of this purse?"

He brought to bear many pointed arguments, but all to no avail. Dink had suddenly discovered the power of a real wallop and was content to rest upon the laurels of his present explorations. In despair Cohen's manager asked the same question as the promoter:

"Who bumped against this 'misfit' in the crowd?"

Upon being told, he turned to Socker. "Dooley, I didn't think you carried enough of the old 'sock' to do it!"

It was meant as a tribute, but it carried a sting.

Socker showed the sting in his response. "If dat chinless monster you manage had even see de punch, he'd uh fainted!" he snapped.

"You mean Cohen?"

"Well, yuh ain't managin' Dempsey, are yuh?"

Now, most people who hear fight managers talk become convinced at once that they never have an idea. This is wrong. Cohen's manager got one on the spur of that fateful moment. I am willing to concede that the thing was unusual, as was easily seen by the fact that his eyes bulged, his cheeks puffed, words came haltingly. He looked and acted like a traffic cop who has balled up his signals and cannot readily light upon some one to blame for it. But he really had the idea and the sense not to waste time trying to explain it needlessly.

He grabbed the promoter by the arm and led him into a corner. After a brief moment of expostulation they called Socker Dooley into the conference. Witnesses saw the old light again flare into Socker's eyes; they saw him nod his head vigorously and dart to the side of Dink Murphy. His actions there convinced them that the astounding was about to happen. Even before the announcement was made from the ring, they knew that Socker was to take the place of Murphy and that Cohen's manager had talked a purse out of a situation that a moment before seemed hopeless.

Don't think that Socker lacked friendly advice; that willing hands were not ready to perform almost forgotten duties. The whole fringe was about to see force of circumstance defeat the centrifugal push which had made them has-beens. If Socker happened to make good, every one of them would spend the next day talking about a come-back.

They wrapped his hands, the put Dink Murphy's shoes on his feet, piled his worn clothes on the table, and helped him into the flaring green tights that had adorned Dink. Then, with a flourish and a muttered word of encouragement, they threw the bathrobe about his shoulders and started him on the walk back to the center of things.

And you should have seen the look in the eyes of him as he swung through the fringe!

Any fight is better than no fight on fight night, and the fans were vociferous in their greeting of the knight of a day long gone. Socker felt himself impelled to do his utmost by the cheers that his appearance brought. What an ineffable joy it was to kick the little stool in his corner into a different if no better place! And there never was a sensation to equal the thrill that came from rubbing his—or Dink's—shoes in the resin.

The referee called them to the center of the ring. His words were music to the ears of the veteran; music he had thought never again to hear and all the sweeter therefore.

"Hit with one arm free," the referee was saying, "but break clean at the word. And remember this ain't a parade, and you are getting paid for a fight, not a dance!"

They returned to their corners. Some one pulled the robe from the shoulders of Socker. He looked over the heads of the ringsiders, the two dollar gents, 'way back to the fifty centers, then past them to the very fringe whence he had come. A flicker of a smile played over his battered face; for him the hand of fate had turned. Two hundred dollars was his end as a loser. He hadn't even figured out what the winner's end was.

The bell rang, and he whirled as of old to meet the man from "across the canvas." There were kinks in Socker's elbows, quiverings in his knees, and his knuckles had turned to "chalk," but there was nothing lacking in the head that would direct the superannuated physical machine.

Cohen was across the ring like an infuriated bull. He wanted to get Dooley before the latter was out of his chair and upset any battle plan the latter might have formulated. What he failed to realize was that Socker Dooley was in there for one purpose only—two hundred dollars. He was

perfectly willing to take a beating to get it, but had no intention of taking it any sooner than necessary. With a grin of experience he sidestepped the rush and let Cohen crash into the ropes. Incidentally Socker stuck a snappy right onto the younger man's ear and grinned broader than ever at the rousing yells that came from the crowd.

"Better learn somethin' about dis game, kid," he chuckled audibly.

Cohen let prudence replace valor in his attack. He sparred a moment, then led with his left. Socker took the punch on the shoulder and countered with a right that hurt.

Again came the grin, also the yells of approval and encouragement. Cohen took it upon himself to indulge in a little repartee by way of showing the contempt in which he held his aged opponent.

"Ain't you surprised ter git in here—an old guy like you?"

"Damned if I ain't," agreed Socker genially. "Only after dat wallop comin' back ter me like dat yuh can't blame 'em for wantin' me!"

"I ain't felt no wallop yet."

"I ain't sent none—yet. I wouldn't uh hit a kid like Murphy if I wasn't sore. It's too bad; w'en dey picked him up dey found de wallop on de chin shook him so it busted his shoestrings."

"Huh," grunted Cohen.

"Come on there," admonished the referee; "this ain't a debate!"

But before the warning could produce results the bell rang, and the veteran had won the first round on points. Came a session of violent towel swinging, a general drenching of the ringsiders by the enthusiastic "seconds" who deem it their especial privilege to desecrate all the prerogatives of a water bucket, and endless words of counsel.

In the minute of rest Socker saw a police officer approach the side of the ring. When the bell rang he called Cohen's attention to the fact and assured him, during the first clinch, that more complete returns had shown that most of Murphy's hair had fallen out as a result of the blow Socker had so thoughtlessly delivered and that there was little hope that his neck was not broken. This accounted for the presence of the police. They were there to see that Socker did not escape.

"Can de chatter," growled Cohen. "Come in an' fight—"

And right there Socker knew that he had accomplished the thing he had been after. There was a relaxing of vigilance on the part of Cohen. An enlarged sense of security born in the intentionally light blows Socker had delivered and the willingness of the veteran to "talk it out," thus avoiding fast and hard fighting. Socker knew more about the game in one minute than Cohen ever was destined to imagine. With a quick shift and a feint with his left hand Socker started the right that had made him famous. It wasn't a swing, not even a hook. It was a blow that traveled straight from the shoulder. It slid inside the left arm which Cohen hastily threw up as a guard, and the clenched glove thudded against the youngster's jaw.

"Follow 'im up!" bellowed Socker's seconds. "Keep after 'im—you got 'im!" And there wouldn't have been the slightest doubt of it in the old days. The blow had spun Cohen halfway across the ring; his eyes were glazed as he straightened totteringly. But Socker failed to follow. Not a man there knew how much more that blow had hurt Socker than it had Cohen. The knuckles of his right hand refused to move following the impact; dull pains leaped through his forearm. He watched Cohen take the blow and keep up.

The referee could have told you that Cohen's ability to take that punch and stay up did more to beat Dooley than ten punches would have. It meant for Dooley that his whole campaign had hinged upon the trickery that would get that punch over. Everything had been successful but the punch. Now the veteran was faced with the problem of going eight more rounds with his right hand a mere jumble of battered knuckles.

Cohen returned to the fray with a bitter rally that sent more than one agonizing blow against the aged frame of Socker Dooley. It was just a question of how long the old timer could stave off the rushes of youth when the two men took

their corners at the finish of the second round.

The third was as great an exhibition of defensive fighting as ever was seen. Dooley was in and out with every trick of the game. When the rushes of Cohen forced him into a corner or against the ropes, and every man in the place was reconciled to the finish, Socker would slip through the ropes and the referee was forced to separate the men. Thus Socker would dance free to go on with his hopeless battle against time.

"Cut the comedy, Dooley," the referee warned repeatedly. "Stand up to it and fight."

Through it all the half smile never left the face of the veteran. He was playing a game against chance and meant to play it with all the skill he knew. No man ever could say that he quit. If Cohen was to get him at all it would be after Socker had exhausted everything that he knew about the game, and Cohen would have to put him down so hard that he couldn't get up!

By the fifth round Socker was exhausted. His breath came in gasps that seemed torn from the very depths of his outraged lungs, his knees trembled under the ravages of exhaustion, and his stomach became nauseated. Still the grin adorned the scarred features. It was part of the game to go down smiling, the only part left to Socker, and he proposed to pay the piper his full due.

Many times he stung Cohen with his left hand, and the younger man became enraged at the manner Socker used to slip out of harm's way. If he wasn't out, he was in, and when he was in no one on earth could get at him with a real sock. The referee spent half his time in yanking them apart, and the other half in warning Socker to desist holding in clinches.

But even money can fade by comparison with the sentiments of a stressed moment of battle. Socker's whole mind concentrated upon staying the limit of the fight. There were the pals back there in the fringe who were "pulling for him." There was even the chance of future bouts to consider—preliminaries where he might get small purses as a "trial horse." So he struggled on. Very seldom did he land a blow; his work was all defensive.

At the opening of the sixth round the referee called a halt in the fight long enough to warn Socker openly that unless he loosened up and fought he would be ordered out of the ring.

"Be reasonable," wheezed Socker. "Can't yuh give a guy uh chanst? De crowd ain't yellin' too bad, is ut? What de hell d'yuh expect?"

"Fight," snarled the referee. "You can't pull this old stuff on me, I been around too long!"

"Give a guy—" began Socker.

"Shut up and fight, or out you go!" interrupted the third man. "I ain't no sucker for down and out pugs!"

It was getting perilously close to one thing or the other for Socker. Either he took Cohen's wallop or he pretended to, and to do the latter was to hate himself for the rest of his life. Socker was built just that way. In desperation he cast about the depths of his throbbing mind for some forgotten trick that might serve as a panacea for the occasion. The last words of the referee rang in his ears.

"I ain't no sucker for down an' out pugs!" What a message that was for a man tottering on his last legs! Socker slid again into a clinch. Cohen appealed to the refree that he was "handcuffed" once more. The official jammed his hands between the chests of the two men and pried with all his strength. Socker clung, but a new light was in his eyes. Like Cohen's manager, he had an idea, and showed it.

The referee yanked his left arm free and pushed Cohen's shoulder to "break" the men. He knew that his right was still imprisoned between the fighters, but was not aware of the fact that Socker was entirely to blame for that. When he had succeeded in turning Cohen enough to give attention to getting his right arm out, he gave a mighty yank. At precisely the correct moment Socker released the arm.

The inevitable result was that the elbow of the referee flew upward with a mighty thud against the chewing furniture of Cohen. Like a flash Socker was out and around the official, whose left hand was ca-

ressing the funny bone of his right arm. The good left hand of Socker Dooley swung in one mighty arc, the fist at the end of it plunked against the same chewing utensils. Cohen sat on his own heels with an air of complete dissociation with mundane things.

"Go ahead, referee," Socker challenged as the man counted over the fallen Cohen. "Tell 'em all erbout it! Make 'em see yuh been around too long ter be a sucker for a broken down pug!"

The referee maintained a strict silence. There was a look of chagrin on his perspiring face, however, that might have told a lot to one who observed closely.

"Which end uh dis figger are yuh gonna carry?" asked Socker when the count was done.

They helped Cohen into his manager's arms.

"I dunno how the hell you done it!" the executive assured Socker.

"Why, kid," Dooley retorted, "dis boy uh yourn ain't no fighter; he's a musician. Didn't yuh hear him playin' on the floor den?"

In the dressing room the members of the fringe ran true to form. It took Socker Dooley nearly an hour to dress. When finally he had crawled into the old clothes he sought out Dink Murphy.

"Here's yer heirlooms, Dink," he offered magnanimously. "Dey come in handy, an' I ain't no piker. Come out tuh de office an' I'll fix yuh decent."

At the office the winner's share of the purse was found to be three hundred and forty dollars. Socker fingered the bills strangely. They meant clothes, food, comforts that had long since fled his company. He took fifty dollars and handed it to Dink Murphy.

"Git a pack of ciggies," he grinned.

Members of the fringe accounted for another fifty before Socker had won his way to the street.

"Yuh could come back easy, Socker," the recipient of a ten dollar bill assured him. "Yuh got everythin' yuh used ter have!"

"I sure could at dat, Spotty—I sure could—if dey'd allus give me a referee dat's been eround too long ter be a sucker!"

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AT CLOSE OF DAY

WHEN I sit alone in the silence
That comes at the close of my day,
When my work for the time is ended,
And the sewing is all put away,
I can find many things I have slighted,
Many words I haven't said—
And I think them all carefully over
So I won't have to take them to bed.
For of all unpleasant habits
An oldish woman can find,
There is nothing more annoying
Than "something on your mind."
When you lie awake in the darkness,
Hours—and hours—and yet
You can't get rid of the memory
Of something you've done—and regret.

Matilda Roome Duvall.



Mystery Land

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "The Way of the Buffalo," "Brass Commandments," "Riddle Gawne," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

"HIT THE BREEZE."

WHEN Channing left Red Mesa after wounding Lane and receiving assurances from the sheriff that Eve had ridden away unmolested, he returned to the Circle B over the east trail. It was midnight when he stood near the foreman's shack talking with Ned Vallon.

Vallon told him that Green and the deputy and Bassett were in the ranch house; that they had gone in shortly after dark and had not come out. Nor had Vallon seen Eve.

Channing had ridden to Warren's cabin. He had stayed there until long after daylight, helping Warren care for Eve, and when Warren had told him that the girl was resting easy and that he need have no fear, he had returned to the Circle B.

He and Vallon had alternated in watching the house to see that Green and his deputy did not leave to search for Eve, and this morning after returning from seeing Eve, he was in a savagely intolerant mood. That Green and his deputy persisted in staying on at the Circle B irritated him, and he did not answer Vallon when the latter told him the men were still there, but rode past him, halted his horse at the edge of the rear veranda, dismounted and walked in the kitchen doorway.

There was nobody in the kitchen, although on the table were soiled dishes and remnants of food.

Channing walked into the living room. Through a window in the living room he saw Bassett, Green, and the deputy on the front veranda. He opened the door. At the sound he made the men faced him.

Green was sitting on the edge of the

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veranda. The deputy was standing, resting one hand against a column. Bassett was sitting in a big chair. He had been grinning over something that had been said, and when he saw Channing the grin changed to a sullen scowl.

Green reddened, paled; his shoulders drooped. The deputy turned his head and stared into distance.

"You're still here, eh?" said Channing.

Green cleared his throat.

"We intend to stay here until we find Evangeline Winthrop," he stated.

"Yes," said Channing quietly; "you're stayin'. Ten minutes. If you ain't hittin' the breeze pretty medium by that time you're due to stay here considerable longer. Now get goin', you settin' doves! Scat! Vamose! Run along home an' take your damned law with you!"

Bassett got to his feet. Green likewise stood up. Green's face had suddenly turned ashen; his mouth was open, his lips working, though no sound came from them. The deputy seemed to drift down from the veranda. But Bassett's face was swollen with fury, and his gaze was malignant.

"Hell's fire!" Bassett almost screamed. "It's come to a pretty pass when a man can pull off—"

"Open your trap for another word an' I'll knock it off!" said Channing. "What I've said, goes. If you've got any objectin' to do you'll do it after these guys have gone. Losin' your temper in front of company ain't manners. If these sufferin' shorthorns have got real authority to take Eve away they'll get Jim Hale to serve their papers!"

He stood watching the men. When they disappeared around a corner of the house he stepped down from the veranda and noted the direction they took. They went to the stable, emerged, leading their horses.

Vallon was standing near, his hands on his hips, also watching them. Vallon grinned as they mounted; said something to them. So far as Channing could see, they made no answer. A few minutes later they were riding away, toward Red Mesa. Twice within a mile they looked back to see Channing standing near the edge of the veranda, watching them.

Channing did not look again toward the veranda. He entirely ignored Bassett. And Bassett said nothing. He was sitting in a chair, muttering unintelligibly to himself when Channing walked away.

After Channing went, Bassett strode into the house. He stood for some time in the doorway between the living room and the kitchen, keenly feeling the desolation and loneliness of the big house. Curiously, he never thought of blaming himself for the condition; a twisting phase of his malady always placed the responsibility for his misfortunes elsewhere.

He was convinced that Channing was at the bottom of it all. He knew that; had known it. But always, when anything happened, he lacked the courage to face Channing squarely and have it out with the man.

But Channing couldn't fool him. He had kept his eyes open. During different times of the day, when Green and the deputy had been there, he had found time to look out of the rear windows. He had seen that Vallon appeared to be on guard, and that Channing made several trips eastward. That had been over a period of three days.

Channing always went the same way—eastward. Moreover, he always rode straight eastward until he reached the base of the hill where the east trail led to Red Mesa. At the base of the hill Channing always turned south.

Channing came back that way, too, every time.

Channing's trips, Bassett divined, had taken him to Eve. He had Eve concealed somewhere, to hide her from Green and the deputy.

Maybe Eve was staying in that Warren man's cabin! It was not until after Channing had left after sending Green and the deputy away that Bassett thought of Warren. His memory had been prodded by a thought of his hatred of Warren, a hatred which had been provoked by Warren's testimony against him on the day the sheriff had held the inquest over Krell, the gunfighter.

It was Bassett's conviction that Warren would become a party to a scheme like that—to keep Eve away from her rightful protector.

Bassett kept himself well in hand during the day. His rage was tugging at him again, but he knew he didn't dare betray it to Channing. Why, Channing would kill him as quick as he'd look at him! Channing was only waiting for the chance—a chance to shoot him!

He knew that. He'd never press Channing too far. Channing was dangerous. Quick as lightning! Look what he had done to Krell!

A fool, that's what Krell was! Just a damned fool!

He had had everything all planned out. Krell was to pretend to work at the Circle B. Both of them—himself and Krell—were to tame the wild horse a little. Not much, just a little. Enough so they could lead him around. That was all.

Then, when they had the horse sufficiently tamed, they were to carry out the thing Bassett had planned. But Krell had let his temper get the best of him.

Bassett would never make that mistake.

Right now, though he was mad clear through because of the high-handed way Channing was doing things, he kept his temper. Never had he been so cool, so calm; never had his thoughts been as clear. There wasn't a bit of excitement in his manner; his hand was as steady as it had ever been.

He sat around the house until dark. Then, knowing that Channing and Vallon were in the mess house, eating supper; he walked to the corral, got his horse, mounted, and rode northward, toward Red Mesa, over the west trail.

He hadn't ridden a hundred feet when out of the tail of his eye he saw Channing and Vallon watching him. Both had come to the door of the mess house; their figures were outlined in the glare of lamplight from within.

The figures disappeared and Bassett knew both men had stepped out into the darkness.

Bassett rode on. Lest they follow him to determine where he was going he kept on the west trail for several miles. Then riding behind a giant bowlder near the trail he halted and waited.

He waited an hour. Neither Channing nor Vallon came in sight, and therefore Bassett knew he had not been followed. But just to make sure he rode on again and at a bend in the trail he concealed himself again. He waited half an hour this time. Again he rode on. But this time he wheeled his horse and sent him eastward.

He kept to the low country until he reached the east trail. Then he rode southward, following the east trail, which would take him to Warren's cabin.

They'd keep Eve's movements to themselves, would they? Well; he'd see about that!

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDERSTANDING.

EVE'S education, limited to the things her mother had taught her, had given her very little knowledge of men. Her experience with men was not large. She knew Bassett, had studied him, disliked him. She knew several of the Circle B men. Those she had known when a child had one by one left the Circle B. Those who had come afterward she did not know so well.

Ned Vallon was steady, quiet and dependable. It seemed he had always been old. His manner toward her had always been fatherly. She liked him.

Channing was Channing. He occupied a place in her affections that no other man would ever occupy. She loved him. Every time he looked at her with that gentle glint in his eyes she wanted to hug him.

And many times—until the last year or so—she had hugged him. There were times when she still wanted to hug him, but she had heeded a disturbing reserve that, lately, had taken possession of her.

But much as she loved Channing she had never felt in his presence the way she felt when Wayne Warren came near her.

This afternoon, having got up despite Mrs. Bailey's protestations, she was sitting in a rocking chair on the little front porch of the cabin, considering Warren.

Warren had gone riding somewhere; Mrs. Bailey didn't know where; and Eve, although she felt strong enough to ride back to the Circle B, was sitting in the rocker, waiting for Warren to return.

She was waiting, she assured herself, to thank Warren for what he had done for her. It wouldn't be polite to leave without thanking him. He'd think her an ingrate. And so she waited.

She didn't know exactly what had caused her to take offense at the pictures of girls that Warren had shown her on the occasion of her first visit; nor could she explain why all the breath in her body seemed to expand within her when Warren came near her. And then, too, there was the phenomenon of her blushes. She could not see them, but she could feel them.

Warren was dismounting at the gates of the little corral where he kept two horses when she saw him. He apparently observed her at the same instant, for he started, neglected to turn the horse into the corral or remove the saddle and bridle—and came toward her. There was stern reproof in his eyes as he came and stood at the edge of the porch and looked at her.

"I suppose I ought to order you right back to bed," he said severely. "Shall I?"

"Please don't," she smiled.

"Then I won't." He studied her critically. But she wondered if all doctors had such fine eyes, and if they did have them, did they always betray as much concern over every patient? Also she wondered if all doctors blushed when studying their patients?"

"Well," he said finally, "you look pretty comfortable. Any pain?"

"Just a little. In the back of my head."

"H-m!" he said, seeming to be suddenly alarmed. "I'll have a look at that spot."

He stepped to her side and laid a hand on her head, searching with gentle fingers for the abrasion with which he was familiar. After he found it he spent some time looking at it, smoothing her hair with a lightness that seemed much like a caress to her. She sat very quiet, waiting for him to finish.

"It's the prettiest brown I ever saw," he said at length.

"What is?"

"Why, your hair, of course. Didn't you know that?"

"I knew it was brown, certainly. But I never thought of it as being pretty."

"Blind!" he said. "Oh, blind!"

He suddenly became professional again. Still standing beside her he placed a hand gently and firmly under her chin and tilted her head back until she was forced to look into his eyes. But she thought his high color was not professional.

"Do you feel any dizziness?" he asked.

"None whatever." She wondered if he would consider her strange exhilaration dizziness? But of course he didn't know how she felt, and she would never confess it. Yet she was certain he must see it, for his eyes were swimming with knowledge.

"H-m!" he said again, gravely, while the grip of his fingers on her chin increased. "Did any one ever tell you that you have very—er—expressive eyes?"

"No."

"H-m!"

There was disbelief in Warren's gaze, a sort of cynical incredulity.

"Strange," he said. He released her chin, stepped back and sank into a chair.

"What is strange?" she asked.

"That no one has ever mentioned your eyes. Are you sure men have looked at them?"

"Certainly."

"H-m!" Warren seemed disappointed over her instant admission. "Do you mean that other men have looked into them as I looked into them a minute ago?"

"If they had I should have slapped their faces!"

"Well, why didn't you slap mine?"

"Why," she said, astonished; "you are the doctor!"

"Oh!"

Warren smiled; he appeared relieved.

But Eve divined jealousy in his attitude. She felt resentful.

"Are you in the habit of looking at girls like that?" she asked, a chill in her voice.

"Like what?"

"The way you looked at me. Because if you are, I don't think you are very nice!"

"Oh, look here now! A fellow can't help seeing girls."

"Well, he doesn't have to look at them like that."

"I never did. It seems to me that you are the first girl I ever really looked at. In that way, I mean."

"What about those girls in the pictures you showed me?"

"Those girls? Pshaw! Chance acquaintances. I met them at various places—at parties and so on. Crazy about pictures. I just took them as a joke."

"Then why do you keep them?"

"Oh, all men keep little mementos like that."

"Why?"

"Well, to look at, for one thing. They sort of remind one of familiar scenes."

"And faces, I presume."

"Look here, Eve," he protested; "that isn't fair! Their isn't a girl in the bunch that I'd go out of my way to speak to. I'm not to blame because they happened to be in the pictures!"

Eve believed him. She knew earnestness when she saw it. And now that she knew Warren wasn't in love with any of the girls, she felt her jealousy had been unwarranted. She gave Warren a smile that placed him within reach of her again. For a few minutes he had felt like a swimmer drifting out to sea.

Warren had forgotten his professional gravity. His color was again high; he was frankly now nothing more than a mere admirer.

And yet there was guile in his heart. Channing had commissioned him to discover Eve's attitude toward going East to inherit a fortune.

"Don't tell her about them two chromos bein' at the Circle B with Bassett," Channing had said. "That would stampede her, an' she'd go. You sort of go at her in a roundabout way, not mentionin' anything you know. Then, if she's stuck on the idea, we'll have to let her go, I reckon."

Warren began obliquely.

"Doesn't this country ever get monotonous to you, Eve?" he asked.

"Well"—she hesitated—"it does, sometimes. But it never did while mother was alive. But lately"—a shadow crossed her eyes—"I get terribly lonesome. He"—Warren knew she meant Bassett—"is a beast. I hate him! I—I have enjoyed being here. But I suppose I shall have to go back. There isn't any other place for me to go."

Warren felt he had started wrong. Speaking to her of the East in her present frame of mind would be equivalent to trying to prevail upon her to go there. And that wasn't what he wanted. He wanted her to say that she didn't want to go—just now, at least. Later on, after Green and the deputy had given up, he hoped she would decide to go. So he felt his presentation of the attractiveness of the East must lack enthusiasm.

"Well," he said, "the East gets monotonous, too. That's why I came here. One gets tired of the noise and the tumult of cities."

"I never would!"

"I think you would. There's too much rivalry in the East; too much competition. People are getting soulless."

"They couldn't be much worse than him." Again Warren knew she was referring to Bassett.

"Well, Bassett is a bad one, for a fact. But there are just as bad in the East, and more of them. Why, it's got so that a man can hardly walk the streets at night without being sandbagged!"

"What is 'being sandbagged'?"

"Why, being hit on the head with something. Getting one's skull broken."

"They kill them here," said Eve, unsmiling.

"Yes, so they do—sometimes. But more people are killed in traffic accidents in New York alone than are shot out here. Imagine having to risk a broken neck each time you cross a street!"

"There isn't a street out here, and yet I near broke my neck the other night."

"Yes, so you did."

"I'd risk my neck crossing a street in New York or any other city just to look at the pretty things in the store windows," said Eve. She looked at him curiously, a strange wistfulness in her eyes.

"I wonder if you know how I long for pretty things," she added. She contemplated Warren gravely. "I used to have pretty things," she said. "I've been on the streets you talk about; I've been in the stores, the theaters, the hotels. It was when I was very young, but I remember.

"Why, I can't get those things out of

my mind. While mother was alive she used to tell me about them. We'd talk about them, and that sort of satisfied me. But since she's gone I keep thinking of them all the time. There isn't anything you can say about the East that would make me believe it isn't a better place than this!"

"Eve," said Warren gently, his eyes alight with understanding; "your memory of those things was what took you to Red Mesa the other day, wasn't it? You had that old rose dress with you. Your mother's. But it is too big for you. Did that dress take you to Red Mesa?"

"I ordered one almost like it," she admitted. "I wanted to see how I would look in one. But now, I suppose Kinney will cancel the order."

"If he does I'll take a train to where they make them and bring one back to you!" promised Warren.

Eve's pulses leaped. The sincere ring in Warren's voice thrilled her. Various services had been performed for her, by Channing, by Vallon, and others, but always those services had involved something necessary or vital. And here was this Eastern young man offering, perhaps somewhat recklessly, to serve her vanity.

"You like to see girls wear nice things, I suppose?" she asked.

"You!" he answered pointedly. "As a usual thing I never notice what women wear. But you haven't had anything nice to wear in a long time, and I am anxious to see how you will look in them. Stunning, of course. But I want to see."

For a time they sat silent. Their thoughts were somewhat tumultuous. Eve particularly was conscious that her senses were being assailed by an enchanting glamour, a captivating exaltation that had in it a completely satisfying sensation of marvelous understanding.

There flashed into her mind at this instant a passage in the poem, "Mazeppa," which she used to read aloud to Bassett:

> "We met, we gazed—I saw, and sighed;
> She did not speak, and yet replied."

The language was new to Eve. A manifestation of speech without the use of words. *Words* were futile and unnecessary, anyway.

When she saw Warren get up and walk toward her she trembled, but smiled. When he came and stood at her side she looked up at him.

She arose. And then his arms were around her.

An hour later Mrs. Bailey came to the door and looked at them. Eve was again in her chair. Warren had drawn his beside Eve's, and his right arm was over Eve's shoulders. His left hand had captured both of Eve's, and his head was very close to hers.

Mrs. Bailey smiled and stole softly away. In her kitchen she indulged in words.

"By me faith," she said; "it's a sickness that overtakes all of us!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOO OLD.

RIDING the east trail and heading always southward, Bassett came to the crest of the slope that descended to the basin in which Warren's cabin stood. From the crest of the slope Bassett could see a light in the cabin; he could trace the outlines of the cabin itself in the faint light of a crescent moon.

Bassett would have preferred complete darkness. Yet he had no choice, and he eased his horse cautiously down the slope until he reached a level.

There he paused to study his surroundings. He contemplated no violent action to-night, for the reason that he didn't know what he would discover on his nocturnal visit. He wasn't at all certain that Eve was here. In spite of his suspicions Eve might be elsewhere.

Channing might have taken her to another hiding place, or Eve, obeying a willful impulse, might have left the country. Channing might have told her about Green and the deputy; might have helped her to get away.

He had to determine her whereabouts, but he had no intention of going openly and directly to Warren's door to ask him about Eve; for if Warren and Channing didn't want him to know where she was they would hide her and lie to his questions.

No, sir! He was "running" his own game. He wouldn't take any man's word. He'd see for himself.

He found some brush at the edge of the level near the bottom of the slope and hitched his horse to a branch of gnarled scrub oak. Then he made his way stealthily across the level, keeping his head as low as possible and taking advantage of various weeds and bushes to conceal his movements from any one in the cabin who might chance to be looking out.

There was a juniper tree near the front of the cabin. The tree was near the porch, and there was a tangled growth of brush near it where a man might hide without fear of discovery, and from where he would be able to look into the windows of the cabin.

However, an open space, barren except for clumps of weeds here and there, stretched between him and the clump of brush. If a man tried to reach the brush by walking he would most certainly be seen by any one who happened to be looking in that direction.

Therefore, Bassett decided he wouldn't walk. He sank to the barren, and flat on his stomach began to wriggle and squirm his way toward the brush. It was a tortuous journey, and he was fully a quarter of an hour reaching the concealment of the brush, and when he finally reached it and stood erect behind the concealing branches and leaves he was breathing heavily.

There was no sound from the cabin, no movement. There was a light in the kitchen. He could see it through a small window. Also, he could discern a small rectangular patch of the kitchen wall, beyond the light.

But he could see no sign of Warren or Eve or Mrs. Bailey. Yet the light proved some one was in the cabin.

He waited fully half an hour. Once in that time he saw a shadow moving on the kitchen wall—the shadow of a woman's face. The shadow passed so quickly that he couldn't tell whether it was Eve's or Mrs. Bailey's.

He waited a little while, although his curiosity tormented him. He finally decided he'd have to get closer to the cabin if he wanted to find out who had made the shadow. He was about to creep toward the nearest window when he heard a low voice near him. He turned, to see two figures moving slowly toward him along a fringe of brush at his left.

He crouched in his covert, gently parted the branches and peered through. The moon made a very slight impression on the darkness, merely shedding a faintly luminous mist. Yet there was light enough for him to recognize the figures as Warren and Eve, and he grinned in huge derision.

So that was what she was doing at Warren's shack, was it? Mooning around in the dark with him, eh? Making love to him, most likely. Coming over here and walking out alone with Warren, like the brazen thing she was!

Sure! They were making love. Talking low. Hugging. Kissing.

He saw them. There was no doubting his own vision, his own senses!

They were too far away for him to hear what they were saying, but they were close together—so close that he could see their two heads like one.

He didn't intend to interrupt them. Not him! Let them have their fun while the getting was good. He'd ride over to Red Mesa the first thing in the morning and tell Green and the deputy where they could find Eve. They'd get her and take her away, and he would be well rid of her!

He had seen what he had come to see, and was satisfied.

Not that he had been worried about Eve. It wasn't that. He'd been curious, that was all. He had wondered if Channing had taken her out of the country. He knew Channing would do anything for Eve; he knew Channing loved her.

Couldn't he tell? A man's eyes always betrayed him when he was in love with a woman—his eyes and his actions.

Crouching in the brush, he laughed inwardly. His mirth was so great that it threatened to stifle him because he could not let it escape, dared not let it be heard. Eve and Warren would hear *him if he made* a sound. He had to stuff his neckerchief in his mouth or he would have cackled aloud.

Channing was a poor hand with women. He was a complete failure. He'd loved Jane, and lost her; and now he was losing Eve. Warren had her. No chance for Channing. He wished Channing was here, that he might see for himself just how matters stood. He'd give something to be able to watch Channing's face.

His paroxysm over, he again watched and listened. Eve and Warren were walking toward the house. They paused for some little time on the porch, and then they went in. Bassett could see them in the kitchen, their heads together, bending over something.

Bassett did not wriggle and squirm his way back over the level. Warren and Eve were so interested in each other that they'd never think to look outside to see if any one was watching them.

No need now for secrecy or stealth. He walked like a man. He was thrilling with a vindictive triumph. He knew something that nobody thought he knew. When Eve returned to the Circle B ranch house he'd have something to say to her, something with a sting in it!

He reached the clump of brush where he had left his horse.

The moon had gone behind a cloud, and he couldn't see the horse very distinctly, but he heard its hoofs clumping impatiently in the hard sand, and he moved toward it. He was reaching out to feel for the animal's neck when he felt a presence behind him, felt the hard ring of a gun muzzle pressing tightly against his neck.

"So this is where you are, eh?" said a cold voice over his shoulder. "I thought you'd be headin' this way sooner or later."

Channing!

Channing had suspected him, had cut across country. Channing might even have arrived on the slope above Warren's shack before he did.

Channing's next words proved that was the case.

"I've been watching for you a right smart while," Channing said, his voice full of contempt. "I was here when you came; I've been waitin' to see what you was up to."

Bassett's first emotion was fear. His flesh had cringed from contact with the muzzle of Channing's gun. A hot rage succeeded the fear. That, too, left him.

He hadn't done anything. He'd harmed no one. He wasn't afraid that Channing would shoot him for just prowling around Warren's shack. Just now it seemed to him that all emotions other than mirth were trivial.

"Shucks, Channing," he said; "you ain't got no call to go pokin' a gun in my back. I've just been amusin' myself. Sort of struck me that Eve was stayin' away longer'n she ought to. I come here to see what she was doin'. Eve's been a whole lot stubborn, but I never thought she'd let a short-horn like that Warren kiss her."

He paused. He knew Channing wouldn't ask any questions. That wasn't Channing's way. But he felt the gun muzzle waver, felt a perceptible lessening of the pressure against his back. And he heard Channing suck in his breath quickly.

The evidence that Channing was hurt caused him to cackle softly, hilariously.

"Yes, sir—he plumb kissed her! I was standin' right behind them in the brush. They was pretty well clinched. They'd been walkin' in the dark. If he'd have kissed her once it wouldn't have hurt much, eh? But I reckon he kissed her a dozen times. Worst of it was, she seemed to like it."

Bassett felt the gun move again; the muzzle slid down his back, and he knew Channing had lowered it. He had a mental picture of the gun dangling in Channing's hand, and he would have given a great deal to have been able to see Channing's face.

He stood waiting. He wanted to hear Channing's voice. And he heard it; it was hoarse, thick, vibrant, although he could tell that Channing was trying to control it.

"Bassett," said Channing, "get away from here before I kill you!"

Bassett moved to his horse. He found the reins, mounted, and rode a short distance up the slope. Then he laughed, loud enough for Channing to hear, and beat his horse into a leaping gallop.

No telling—Channing might shoot!

But Channing was paying no attention to Bassett at that moment. He did not hear the drumming of Bassett's horse as the animal fled; he did not feel the inquisitive muzzle of his own horse nudging his sleeve.

He had turned his back to Warren's cabin and was standing loosely, his shoulders drooping, his chin on his chest.

Thirty-seven. Too old.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SETTING THE TRAP.

BASSETT rode slowly homeward, indulging his mirth. Recollection of Channing's voice provoked him to bursts of laughter. But Bassett hadn't been riding for more than half an hour when his mood changed and he fell to cursing Channing.

Channing had stuck a gun against his ribs. Channing had ordered him away, had threatened to kill him. He had meant it, too. That was the worst of it; Channing meant everything he said.

Morosely, Bassett's thoughts went to the past. It had been this way from the beginning. From the very day of their first meeting Channing had dominated him.

Now it had got unbearable.

Bassett reached the ranch house, went inside, and lit a lamp. He stood in the living room, scowling. No fire, no food; everything topsy-turvy. He stood swaying, drunk with a rage that came upon him suddenly.

This last insult of Channing's had brought matters between them to a crisis. He had stood on the level at the foot of the slope with Channing's gun against him and had felt no fear. It was the first time since he had known Channing that he had felt no fear in his presence.

Now he was conscious of no emotion except rage. At last his recreant courage had grown so strong that it could endure thoughts of reprisal.

He felt confidence surging through him. It hadn't been so hard, after all, to stand there and feel contempt for Channing's gun. For years he had shrank from thoughts of meeting Channing face to face in open enmity; mentally and physically he had cringed from the man.

It was different now. He had recovered command of himself. He felt he could go through with his plans for his revenge upon Channing.

He went to bed, and did not sleep. He remained wide awake, planning, scheming, figuring, conjecturing, going over and over the details of his plan.

He got up in the morning with the dawn and walked down the path to the foreman's shanty. He opened the door and peered within, to find Channing was not there. He closed the door and walked to the bunkhouse.

Ned Vallon was inside, sitting on the edge of his bunk arrayed in his underclothing. Vallon was just putting on his shirt; he had both hands in the sleeves and was raising his arms to work the garment over his shoulders. Vallon's head was tousled, his eyes were bleared from sleep. They widened in astonishment as they met Bassett's.

"Where's Channing?" was Bassett's question.

"He come in about midnight," answered Vallon. "He didn't turn in. Said he was figurin' on joinin' the boys at Middle Fork."

"When's he comin' back?"

"Seems he mentioned he'd be back tomorrow."

"Comes an' goes when he pleases, eh?" said Bassett. It was as if this was the first time, to Bassett's knowledge, that such a thing had ever happened. But Vallon knew better, and there was amazement in his eyes as he studied Bassett's face. He had never seen Bassett's eyes so bright; had never seen him so assertive, as confident, as commanding.

"Well," he said, "here's some orders for Channing. Orders for you, too, Vallon. You ride to Middle Fork and tell Channing that I want to see him to-night. In my house. At nine o'clock. Tell him I'll be there waitin' for him. There's somethin' I want to talk with him about. An' you stay at Middle Fork until Channing gets back there to relieve you. That's all. You hit

the breeze as soon as you've got your grub."

Bassett went back into the house. He stood at one of the rear windows, where he could watch the bunk and mess houses, the corral, and the stable. And when, an hour later, he saw Vallon come out, rope his horse, throw saddle and bridle on, and ride southward, he smiled.

Well, he'd got Vallon away, and he had made the first move toward the consummation of his plans. There was no backing out now, even if the old fear of Channing should return.

But he knew the fear wouldn't return; he knew he had conquered it. Why, never in all the days of his acquaintance with Channing had he felt so sure of himself. He'd " fix " Channing now!

He walked out upon the rear veranda and stood there until the traveling dust cloud southward diminished until it was nothing but a wisp. Then he went to the stable, opened the doors, and set a prop against them. A little later he was leaning over the top of the partition of the box stall, looking at the wild horse.

The horse lunged at Bassett, teeth bared, ears flat, his glossy neck smooth and sinuous as a snake's body. When Bassett shrank back away from the clashing teeth, the horse reared upright and tried to strike Bassett with his hoofs.

Bassett's face paled with rage.

" So that's your game, is it, you black devil!" he said.

He drew out his six-shooter. Realizing that he would never get a hackamore on the black while the animal was in possession of his senses, he decided to " crease " him. Creasing, however, was dangerous, if a man wanted to keep the animal he creased; and Bassett waited for a few minutes, knowing that his hand was slightly unsteady.

He'd helped break a great many wild horses, but to break one effectually and without danger to the breaker required the services of two or three men—two at the least. There wasn't anybody around to help him, so he'd have to do the breaking alone. That required drastic action.

He got down from the partition, went into the house, and got a rifle. He took a hackamore from a peg, laid it on the floor of the stable near the door of the box stall, got a lariat and placed it alongside the hackamore. Then with the rifle in hand he climbed again to the top of the partition.

He had to wait a long time before the horse turned its head slightly away from him and stood for an instant motionless. Then Bassett took quick though careful aim with the rifle and pulled the trigger. He had planted the bullet through the cartilage at the top of the black's neck, just above the spinal processes, near the poll.

The horse pitched forward and fell, flat on his side, to the floor of the stall. The animal was apparently lifeless, but Bassett knew better.

The shot had been a cunning one, and the horse was merely stunned. Within a few minutes, save for a slight dizziness and a trifling loss of blood, he would be as good as ever.

Bassett slipped down from the partition, dropped the rifle, leaped to the door of the box stall, and threw it open. Then he grabbed the hackamore, entered the stall, and slipped the device over the head of the recumbent animal.

He got the lariat, tied one end of it to the hackamore, which was of Spanish invention, and its ropes and straps so arranged that a steady, strong pull upon it would close fast upon the nose and make breathing difficult. Running the rope under the door of the box stall, he closed the latter, locked it, and went for another horse.

Within a few minutes he rode into the stable. He dismounted, took up the free end of the lariat and fastened it to the saddle, so that it could be released with a single jerk. Mounting again, he rode to the door of the stall and swung it wide open.

The black horse had regained its feet. It stood, legs asprawl, head down, breathing shrilly. When it felt the pull of the rope leading from its muzzle to Bassett's saddle, it at first resisted. But when the hackamore's noose closed under the pull and breathing became difficult, the wild horse followed Bassett's horse out of the stable.

There was a short conflict just outside of the stable, when the wild horse, reviving rapidly and getting a scent of the fresh, keen air, sought to jerk its way to freedom. But again the cruel hackamore shut off its breath, and again he followed Bassett.

Bassett rode to a grass level a little distance from the ranch house. He had brought a stake pin with him, and he slipped out of the saddle and drove the stake pin deep with a sledge that he had taken to the spot previously. He jerked the end of the rope loose from the saddle, tied it to the ring in the stake, leaped into the saddle and rode a short distance to watch the behavior of the wild horse.

Bassett had seen many of these performances, and he was interested in this one only to the extent of determining how long the wild horse would struggle. His one concern was that the animal might break its neck, and when the wild horse, resolved upon gaining his freedom by breaking the hated rope, ran at full speed to the end of it and finished flat on his back with his heels in the air, his breath knocked from his body, but otherwise uninjured, Bassett grinned hugely.

Bassett did not watch long. He had other things to do. He rode back to the stable and left the wild horse to his own devices, knowing that at the end of an hour or so the animal would have different views on the efficacy and reliability of a rope.

Bassett went into the harness shop. He labored there for two hours, selecting straps, riveting buckles upon some, removing buckles from others; sorting ropes and fashioning them into queer looking forms.

Getting them all together he carried them to the house and laid them on the floor of the living room, in a corner, and covering them with a cloth that he took from a lounge. Two short ropes, such as were used to "hogtie" cattle, he laid on a shelf above the other ropes.

He went outside again, got his horse, mounted it and rode to where he had staked the wild horse. He sat watching it, his gaze critical, speculative.

"Mazeppa," he said, half breathing the word. It was as though it had come from his subconscious brain. He at first seemed surprised to hear it. And then a grin wreathed his lips. Nothing astonishing about his speaking the word; he'd been thinking about Mazeppa.

"As good a name as any. But you won't be needin' any name after to-night," he said to the horse, and laughed aloud at a thought that came to him.

He had brought a blanket from the stable and he rode around the wild horse waving it and snapping it in the animal's face.

The black was in a frenzy of fright. Half a dozen times he ran the length of the rope, only to be thrown heavily.

Bassett quit that sport; he was afraid the wild horse would be injured, although the experience would teach him not to be afraid of things that slapped and snapped near him.

What Bassett wanted to do was to train the wild horse so that he could get near him; he wanted the animal to learn to respect a rope.

He went into the stable and returned with another lariat. He coiled it, poised its noose. Then with a sinuous movement he threw it. It flew out, encircled the wild horse's left foreleg just above the fetlock. The wild horse leaped into the air. Bassett cunningly backed the horse he was riding and the black was thrown.

Bassett worked the loop off. Again he threw it. Again the black, his frenzy less apparent, fought the rope. Again he was thrown.

A half dozen times was this performance repeated. And then Bassett returned to the house, got himself some dinner and sat on the front porch, smoking.

Later he revisited the wild horse. This time he went on foot, rope in hand. He walked around the horse several times, just beyond the radius of the stake rope—slowly, casually. Gradually he moved inward, lessening the diameter of his continuing circles.

Gradually, too, the wild horse seemed to grow accustomed to the hideous aspect of the spectacle. He began to understand that if he did not fight the rope it would not hurt him.

Late in the afternoon there came a time when the wild horse stood, trembling, while the rope was extended toward him. And

then, before he knew what was happening, Bassett's heavy hand was on the hackamore. The wild horse plunged and reared. Efforts was fruitless. The hackamore shut off his breath.

Then a handkerchief went over his eyes, and was tied. His world grew dark and he stood, quivering in every nerve and muscle, while Bassett's hand, now light and gentle, stroked his muzzle.

Later, Bassett led him to the shade of a tree near the rear porch, tied him, stood for a time watching him, and then went into the house.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO LOVES.

EVE and Warren had ridden to Red Mesa on the chance that the gown she had ordered had arrived. She rode homeward with Warren, holding the package tightly, treasuring it as she had treasured the other on h[illegible] Warren's cabin on the day she had shot Jay Ventray. This time there had been no misunderstanding on Kinney's part; no one had molested Eve.

Kinney's conduct was faultless. "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am" had been the limit of his conversation. And "Hope you'll come again" were his words when his customers departed from the portals of his store.

Different had been the treatment accorded Eve. She felt different. Then she had fled with hideous emotions tugging at her, now, she was loping her horse slowly southward, thrilling with delight over the possession of the gown and awesomely enjoying her new found happiness.

Moreover, Warren had told her a secret which he had been guarding jealously.

He, not Green, was the instrument of the law's selection which was to guide her destinies until she became legally of age. Warren was a son of the man who was really her guardian, and he had come into the country unannounced, to make certain there was no mistake in identity.

Green and his deputy were impostors. Jim Hale, the sheriff, knew it, for various telegraphic communications had proved it. Besides, he knew the elder Warren intimately. He had not interfered with Green and the bogus deputy because he was curious to see how far they would press their dishonest claim.

Last night Warren had revealed to Eve the vastness of her new riches, and she was only beginning to realize what the change was going to mean to her. And as she rode to-day there was a shadow of regret in her eyes.

"It isn't fair!" Eve said when, topping a rise, she halted her horse and gazed at a far mesa, its broad, dun top, like a gigantic table, aflame in the sun. A great distance beyond the mesa a mountain peak, remote, aloof, majestic, solemnly lifted its rugged shape into the calm sky. Intervening were spires of granite, bastioned towers, minarets. Wavering, sinuous lines of dry gulch wound away, vanishing into a blue, tenuous haze at the bases of the foothills.

Eve thrilled to memories of past days as she gazed at the country around her. Not until this minute had she realized that she had always loved it.

"What isn't fair?" asked Warren. His horse was beside hers.

"That this news should come to me after—that it must come now, after I've lived here so long."

"You mean that you love it?"

"Wayne, I believe I could never be satisfied in any other place!"

"That won't be difficult to arrange," he suggested. "We'll live East for a time, and when it begins to tire you, we'll come back."

"Yes," she whispered eagerly. "Yes! And I shall come back soon!"

"But not too soon," he smiled. "There are a number of things in the East that you must see—places and people that perhaps will make you forget this country."

"Wayne," she said, "I shall never forget Channing. What will he do after—after I leave?"

Warren gazed at her, sober of face. Then he smiled.

"Don't worry about Channing. From what I have seen of him he is able to take care of himself."

She lifted her gaze to his, and Warren could see that her eyes were troubled.

"Wayne," she said slowly, "do you think Channing likes me?"

"He couldn't help that, of course."

"Do you think he loves me?"

"Well—er—yes; I think he does. But it isn't—" He drew his brows together doubtfully. "But it isn't—that is, I think it isn't the sort of love that—" He paused and blushed. "What I mean to say is that Channing no doubt loves you in about the way a brother loves a sister.

"You see, Eve, Channing is getting along in years. He's thirty-seven. Besides, if he loved you as I love you he wouldn't have stayed around you without wanting to marry you. It isn't reasonable!"

Wayne was undoubtedly right. That was Eve's decision. And yet, somehow, she felt that Wayne hadn't expressed it just right. There was something more to be considered—a something that had always swam deep in Channing's eyes, unexpressed, unfathomable. Her happiness of to-day was haunted by that curious expression; Channing's face was ever before her.

From the very first she had loved him. But her feeling toward him was not like that she felt for Warren; it had never had the fire and the thrill that was in her affection for Warren.

She couldn't love both men, of course. One or the other of them she must give up, must forget. It would have to be Channing, too; she knew that. And yet her heart was heavy as she rode on by Warren's side, because she knew, now that she discovered the meaning of love, that Channing loved her.

Eve was going back to the Circle B. Between them—Warren and herself—they had decided that she could no longer stay at Warren's cabin.

"It won't be long, though," said Warren as they halted at the base of the hill where the trails diverged—one leading to the Circle B, the other to Warren's cabin, southward.

"To-morrow night we start East," he added. "I have arranged for a buckboard to take our things over. I'll call for you early, so we won't have to hurry."

Warren rode southward. He looked back many times, waving his hand to her as long as he could see her. And then Eve rode slowly toward the Circle B.

The sun was going down. As she rode onward it sank behind a distant mountain range, bathing the world with a flood of orange and gold. Shadows stole out from the bases of the mountains; a rose veil was drawn from north to south, shutting off the western horizon. The sky changed from orange and gold to amethyst and pearl; the varied colors of the afterglow faded; and suddenly the dusk had come.

Eve rode down past the bunk and mess houses, near the corral. Since she had got a vision of a new life, the old scenes had lost their charm. She was reluctant to enter the ranch house, because she now loathed Bassett and she didn't want to meet him, to listen to the rebuke that was sure to come.

She knew Bassett didn't know what had happened to her; he had no knowledge of her injury; she was not certain that he knew of the shooting of Jay Ventray. He would think evil of her, anyway, no matter what knowledge he had, and she didn't want to listen to him.

Almost in front of the bunk house she came upon Channing. He was crossing the level between the corral and the stable. In the dim light she could see his horse standing near the corral fence, saddled and bridled. Channing had just ridden in.

He was at her stirrup when she drew her horse to a halt. She felt a sudden pity for him as she saw his face in the dim light, his eyes glowing at sight of her.

"So you're back?" he said, his voice leaping strangely. "I reckon you're feelin' a lot better?"

"I'm all right now, Channing," she answered. She slipped out of the saddle and stood beside him, looking up at him. She was going to find it very hard to tell him.

"You're sure your head doesn't hurt any?" he asked.

She shrank at the grave solicitation in his voice. She felt unworthy, guilty.

"Not a bit," she replied. She laughed tremulously. "Why, I've been to Red Mesa!" she told him.

" Well, now," he said, " that doesn't show any great disability!"

" Mr. Warren went with me," she went on, looking downward and not meeting Channing's eyes. " And Mr. Warren gave me some news which is going to change things very much, Channing."

" I reckon changes are bound to come, Eve," was his grave observation.

" You will be surprised, Channing."

" Well, mebbe. But I reckon I'll be able to stand it."

" Are you sure, Channing? You are never going to be angry with me, are you?"

Shucks!"

" I knew it. Channing, do you know what brought Mr. Warren out here?"

" I never could guess."

" Channing, Mr. Warren is the son of the man who is really my guardian. He told me about Green, the man mother and myself worked for years ago, who is now trying to make people believe he has authority over me. Green is an impostor. Jim Lane knows it, for he has communicated with Mr. Warren's father.

" Mr. Warren came out here to make certain of my identity. My father, who was divorced by my mother, was very rich. He died two years ago and left a great deal of money to me. And now, Channing, I must go away for a time."

" When are you goin'?"

Channing's voice was low, even.

" To-morrow afternoon. Mr. Warren is going to call for me and drive me over to Red Mesa in a buckboard."

So Warren's " peregrinations " hadn't been senseless wanderings after all! There had been deep method in his apparent aimlessness. Channing was silent after uttering the one sentence:

" I'm a heap pleased that things have turned out this way, Eve."

" Are you sure, Channing?" asked Eve, breaking the silence.

" I reckon. This ain't no place for a girl like you, Eve. You'll be a lot happier East."

" I'm not sure," she said doubtfully. And then, slowly, hesitatingly, she asked:

" Channing, do you like Mr. Warren?"

Even if Bassett hadn't told him about seeing Warren and Eve kissing, Channing would have known now. For he caught the eager note in her voice, divined the agitation behind the question. If there had been light enough he was sure he would find her face suffused with blushes.

He had suffered the real pang of disappointment when Bassett had told him about the kissing. Eve's words and manner were merely corroboration.

" Warren is a man, Eve," he said quietly. " I hope you will be happy with him."

" You knew!" she breathed, astonished.

" Shucks!" he said. " I saw that the first day—when you an' me went over to call on him."

" And you are not angry at me? Or disappointed?" The last very softly.

" Disappointed because you're goin' to be happy? Shucks, Eve!"

That was all he could trust himself to say. He'd say more to her to-morrow, after he had schooled himself to fortitude that he did not feel at this minute. He patted her on a shoulder, told her he'd see her before she left on the morrow—and turned away.

But he was back after he had taken one step.

" That ain't your horse," he said.

" He belongs to Mr. Warren," she answered. " Mine was hurt when I took that tumble. I had to leave him. After I go you'll ride over and get him, won't you, Channing. I'll want him again some day."

" Yes," he said. " I'll not forget."

She took his hands, squeezed them impulsively, remounted the horse and rode toward the house. Channing watched her until she vanished into the shadows near the rear veranda, until he saw her again, faintly, dismounting at the edge of the veranda. He made out that she was hitching the horse to one of the columns. That meant she intended to ride again, he supposed.

Well, let her ride. She'd want to ride out again in the darkness, to enjoy alone her new happiness. He knew what that meant. The feel of the cool night air against one's cheeks; the mighty panorama of clouds and sky, mysterious, ever-changing.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



The Tattling Thing

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

RAINHAM sat at his desk staring moodily at a letter which his private secretary had just delivered. He knew the writing. It was unmistakable. He ripped it open and read:

DEAR SIR:

The interest on your mortgage is now overdue. Unless the money is forthcoming immediately, I shall be forced to foreclose.

Very truly,

JOHN CRANHOUSE.

Rainham slowly placed the letter on the desk-blotter. He bit at his thin lips. For the money could not be forthcoming. He had exhausted all his resources. That would mean that the home of his ancestors with its broad, pleasant acres must follow the downward course of everything else. He knitted his brow in a futile attempt to see a way out. Yet he knew there was none. His credit was void—his resources nil.

He picked up the letter again. Its curt lines bit into his brain like corroding acid. That was like Cranhouse—damned leech, blood-sucker! Here he knew that he could hope for no leniency. And Cranhouse had long wanted Broadlawns.

Darker and darker grew Rainham's face.

At this moment the dapper secretary reentered.

"About these letters, sir—" he began.

Carston was above all things observing. He saw the black fury which covered Rainham's face. He noted the open letter which he had just before delivered. He was familiar with the chirography of Cranhouse. There had been other epistles, all of a similar character—demanding overdue money in peremptory terms. Financial clouds had been slowly, but surely, gathering for the last few months. But previously Rainham had in some way weathered the impending storm. Could he no longer stave it off?

Carston coughed apologetically. "About these letters, sir?" he began again.

Rainham glared at him with bloodshot eyes. He banged a fist on the desk.

"To hell with the letters! Can't you see I'm busy! Don't interrupt me again until I ring. Do you hear?"

Carston bowed and withdrew without comment.

The room seemed unbearably warm. Its atmosphere carried an aura of impending disaster which Rainham's tightly strung nerves quickly sensed. Some malignant influence seemed to be hovering about him. And it had come with that damned letter. Furiously Rainham tore the communication to bits, stuffed it into the ash-receiver, and touched a match to the pieces. Breathing heavily he saw the shreds darken, crumble, and then turn to ashes—dead ashes. What a pity that their writer couldn't follow them! The usurious money-shark!

Rainham stepped to the coat-rack, taking his cap and coat. He was consumed with a fever to get away from the room with its dead, heavy air and its deader ashes. Perhaps a brisk walk down in his woods edging Dead Men's Curve would put new blood into him along with more sanguine thoughts.

As Rainham hastily opened the door and entered the corridor, Carston was just emerging from his room. He would have bowed without saying anything. But the sight of him brought Rainham to an abrupt halt.

With the burning of the inflammatory letter some of his red anger had abated. The impending disaster was not quite so imminent. A shade of shame seized Rainham. He had been rude to Carston, who was a good enough fellow, a punctilious machine.

In his usual voice Rainham said confidentially, "Oh, Carston, I seem to be a bit off color. Going down in my woods for a stroll and a bit of air. I'll be back at—" He jerked out his watch. "Stopped," he muttered. "That's funny. Must have forgotten to wind it. What time is it?"

Carston quickly produced his time-piece. He stated the exact hour.

"Is your watch right?" inquired Rainham, for he was punctilious about such things.

"Yes, sir. I just called up Western Union and set it not fifteen minutes ago."

"Good," commented Rainham. "When I come back I'll go over those letters with you."

"Very well," answered Carston evenly, and went about his tasks.

Rainham left the house by the rear door. He went to the garage and brought out his roadster. He drove to the woods which lay some two miles from the house. He guided his car into a thickly wooded trail swerving off from the main line of travel. One hundred and twenty-five yards further along on the pike yawned Dead Men's Curve. As Rainham slammed the door of the roadster he thought of the lives the curve had claimed. For it was notorious for miles about. Well, such a death wasn't so bad! Swift, certain, without the stigma of financial ruin.

Thoughtfully he strolled among the rustling trees. It was late afternoon and the weather was mild and balmlike. It laved his ragged nerves. Yet every step he took only drove home more poignantly the realization that Broadlawns would shortly pass from him into the hands of another. The thought of this and Cranhouse gradually became unbearable. Resolutely he tried to thrust these biting ideas out of his mind.

Presently he entered a magnificent plot of evergreens. The pine needles stretched out a pungent, velvety carpet. The trees swayed lazily. From a tall pine near by a bird warbled. But the sound of its song chilled Rainham. There was a melancholy, minor note in the melody which somehow took him back to that evil-smelling room—to the papers he had burned.

As he paced along soundlessly he suddenly stopped. Before him in a little opening by a gurgling brook, a man was bent over with a can. His back was turned toward Rainham. And just beyond the intruder was Rainham's sign warning every one against trespassing under penalty of the law. There were many duplicates of the sign. Yet here was the impudent fellow almost squatting beneath it and flagrantly ignoring it!

Rainham was sadly out of tune with everything. On a normal day he would have shrugged his shoulders and passed along, only mildly aroused by the occurrence. But to-day the trespasser was like a red flag to his ugly frame of mind.

He stepped noiselessly forward. "Well!" he rapped out.

At the sound of the harsh word the man faced about quickly.

Rainham stepped back a pace. For before him stood Cranhouse, the very man who had inflamed his volatile nature to the exploding point and had threatened to take his last dollar.

Cranhouse stared at him insolently, even sneeringly.

Infuriated by his expression Rainham roared, "Don't you see that sign—'No Trespassing'—in my woods—"

"*Your* woods!" sneered Cranhouse.

All the rancor, the blind fury and the hate which was pent up in Rainham's excitable nature now broke loose. Drawing in his breath with a hissing sharpness, he leaped at the man facing him. His fist shot out. It took Cranhouse squarely on the jaw. He went down like a slain bullock, striking his head on a half-projecting root. The tin pail rattled raucously, vaguely reminding Rainham of that sinister minor note he had just heard in the bird's low carol. The water splashed upon his ankles and chilled him to the very heart.

Cranhouse still remained motionless where he had fallen. Rainham's boiling anger cooled. Fear crept in from the interstices of the woods. It bore down upon him—overwhelmingly oppressed him.

He stooped over and touched the prostrate Cranhouse's wrist. It was pulseless. He tried again. With the same result.

The man was dead.

Horror now descended upon Rainham. Cranhouse dead, and he his murderer! The death would, moreover, appear premeditated, done in cold blood. The motive would not be far to seek. It was the debt he could not pay. Perspiration beaded his brow. He shivered, backed away, and planned to flee before it was too late. They must not find him here.

Then he paused sharply in his flight toward his hidden car. He heard the shrill honk-honk of an auto approaching Dead Men's Curve from the south. He was grateful for the falling darkness. It hid him and the havoc he had wrought in his hasty anger. Blindly he strove to think. The intense stillness of the woods calmed him slightly. He kept his back toward the body of the dead man.

Then a plan began to fall into shape in his mind—a way out. Cranhouse's death must not appear suspicious. It must be made to bear all the earmarks of an accident.

Shutting his teeth he forced himself to make a minute examination of the body. Once he jumped, almost unnerved by the dry crackle of a twig. Yet his shivering glance over his shoulder showed him nothing. Again he turned his attention to the still figure, examining it with frenzied care. Then his breath wheezed sharply in relief. For the body of Cranhouse seemed quite unmarked. Concussion of the brain probably.

Carefully he replaced the prone figure with its head against the root. Hurriedly he examined the pine-strewn area in the vicinity. There was nothing there to whisper of violent death. Cranhouse might even have been seized with a paralytic stroke, with some insidious heart malady, and fallen heavily, striking his head against the deadly tree-extremity.

With a final glance behind him Rainham stole by another path toward his concealed car. Half way to his destination he stopped abruptly. The tin can which Cranhouse had been filling now dominated his mind. In a flash he understood its meaning. Funny how the thing had escaped him before. Cranhouse had come in his car, of course. He was getting water for the radiator. The machine might even now be parked by the roadside. In an hour full darkness would descend. The car would be a menace in the road, would demand investigation. The woods would be searched for the missing owner. Cranhouse's body would then be discovered.

Rainham now became desperately anxious to see the car. He crept to the edge of the thick-growing underbrush by the roadside, and walked along some paces. Finally his straining eyes discerned the powerful black roadster parked off the road under the heavy shadows of overhanging trees and bushes. It was even now hardly visible to the motorist exerting every nerve

to ascend or descend the treacherous Dead Men's Curve in safety.

Suddenly the hidden roadster with its proximity to the curve suggested another plan. It might be that in his haste he had overlooked some deadly telltale mark on the lifeless body. It had been difficult to see, and he had been flustered in his examination. And that would point after all to foul play. The body must not be left there to be discovered. Cranhouse must be made to die by quite another agency.

Rainham ran to his own car. With trembling fingers he opened his tool chest and brought out a wrench. He stole back with it through the bushes to Cranhouse's big roadster. He pulled his motor-cap well over his forehead, hunched up his coat-collar. Then in the screening shadows he knelt by the rear wheels. He loosened the nuts on both the brake-drum rods. He tested them. The brakes would not hold, thanks to his clever tampering. He stuffed the wrench in his pocket and raced back in the gathering twilight to the prone body of Cranhouse.

With an effort he raised it and flung it across his shoulder. It sagged limply. Staggering he retraced his steps. Once a curious branch slapped him in the face; again a dangling hand kept tapping him familiarly on the back as it moved with his movements. The weird taps chilled him. Cold sweat poured down his face. But he kept doggedly on.

Arrived back at the bushes by the roadster he stopped to reconnoiter. All was silent. Fortunately the top of the machine was up. And it was too dusky for any unwelcome motorist to distinguish anything suspicious. He opened the door of the roadster and deposited the body of Cranhouse in a sitting posture behind the wheel. Then he started the engine. He was all eyes and ears. Yet no unnerving intrusion interrupted his movements. And Dead Men's Curve was but a hundred yards ahead!

With the door of the roadster open in readiness, Rainham threw the gearshift into first. The car started slowly with his guiding hand on the wheel. The dead man's slumped body interfered but little. Carefully he negotiated second and high, holding the wheel steadily. The car shook itself and slowly gathered speed. It was a straight road down that declivity with sheering banks on either side. Dead Men's Curve was now but ninety yards ahead. The odometer began to climb—twenty—twenty-five — thirty. Here Rainham switched on the lights and leaped from the fast-moving car. He landed in a sand gully, quite unhurt.

With his heart pounding like the thundering engine, he saw the great roadster gather momentum on the descent to the sharp curve—forty miles—forty-five—fifty. The tail-light was like a red-eyed laughing fiend behind the death-car. Hypnotically it kept Rainham's bloodshot eyes on it. It was like the presignal of death.

The powerful, racing roadster hit the curve. The deadly chasm yawned there for its next victim. Rainham was now very cool and collected. The word *victim* had restored his equilibrium.

There was an increased roar—an aching void—then a resounding crash.

Silence. Emptiness stared from the darkness at the curve. The red eye and its victim had gone. The evidence would now be complete.

Moved by a sudden impulse Rainham drew out his watch. He looked at the illuminated hands. The crash had sounded at 7.25. He returned the timepiece, gloating on his cleverness. The switching on of the lights had been a masterly touch. He had almost forgotten that artistic item. It would not have done to find that car down in the gulch unlighted. He couldn't be sure that the fearful descent would have shattered the electrical system.

Rainham now dived into the woods and ran toward his own hidden car. He felt cool and collected as though a great burden had been shifted from his shoulders. He returned the wrench to the tool-box and locked it. The turning of the key was like locking a secret door on an ugly chapter in his life.

Yet as he put his foot on the running-board something distressed him. Was some prescience warning him that he had forgotten the eternal, trivial thing which so often

proved the undoing of even the most hardened criminal? He thought with an agony of intentness. *Then he knew.*

He had told Carston that he was going to his woods by Dead Men's Curve for a walk. Carston had recognized Cranhouse's writing on the letter—knew its importance. He had even seen him poring over it, his face black with anger. Mightn't that point an absolute finger of suspicion at him and weaken his carefully arranged accident alibi?

Rainham grew worried. What a fool he had been to mention where he was going to Carston! But how should he know that Cranhouse would be trespassing on the land he had doubtless come to inspect as his own property! Damn him!

Irresolutely Rainham paused. The old fear returned. Yet there must be some way out, some way to dust the ever-vigilant and suspicious eyes of the law.

Then he laughed harshly. For a way had daringly presented itself.

He jumped into the seat of his car and started the motor. He backed out at a furious pace. He tore home recklessly, congratulating himself on the bold stroke he was cutting. Absolutely safe too. The police couldn't suspect him now. And Dead Men's Curve was at a most isolated spot. There was no other witness to the vanished car and its gruesome burden. It might be hours before anything was discovered—unless he chose to notify the authorities, *when the time was ripe*. Then it would take them at least an hour to make the run from the city. Excellent! He would have them hoodwinked.

At 7.35 Rainham sat down with Carston for dinner. He left the table at eight o'clock without tasting his dessert. He stated that his head still ached and that he would take another spin in the air before attending to the neglected letters.

Shortly he was speeding away again.

Fifteen minutes later he burst into the room where Carston was working. His hair was wild and his hat crammed on the back of his head. He had worked himself up to a convincing fervor.

"My God!" he shouted hoarsely. "Another accident at the curve! Just saw a car go over! Horrible! I shall never forget that crash!"

Shakily he took down the receiver. He called the police department.

"Another car has gone over Dead Men's Curve," he announced—"All right. What do I know? I was driving above the curve—I saw a man tinkering at the rear wheels—of his car. As I drew nearer he jumped in—and started the engine. Soon he was moving at a furious pace. He approached the curve like the wind. He must be a stranger in these parts—or else something was wrong with his brakes. I held my breath in horror, creeping along the grade in my machine. As he struck the curve his car went over with a fearful crash. Mechanically I pulled out my watch to mark the time. I heard the crash at 8.10. Yes, 8.10. Case for the ambulance, probably, poor fellow! If you want me later for a witness, you can find me at my house. I am Rupert Rainham. Very good."

Limply he hung up the receiver.

Four hours later a short ring on the doorbell pealed through Rainham's house. He had been working late. Carston ushered in a man in uniform and another in plain-clothes. Then he shut the door after the two callers and returned to his work.

As Rainham saw the two he was again oppressed by a mighty fear. Yet he strove to conquer it. Perhaps they only required his formal testimony.

"Mr. Rainham?" inquired the man in uniform.

Rainham nodded.

"Sorry to disturb you. I merely called to get your affidavit about this distressing accident at the curve."

"I have already told the story," suggested Rainham.

"I know. Sorry to seem a nuisance. It is a mere matter of form, you know. Besides, there may be something you wish to change—"

Rainham considered carefully.

"No," he decided finally, "my original statement stands."

Then he repeated his first story with painstaking exactitude. The man in uniform took it down word for word.

"Now, if you will please sign and swear that this is the truth, the whole truth—" he suggested deprecatingly.

"Certainly I swear," glibly answered Rainham.

With an inward sigh of mighty relief, he affixed his signature.

The man in uniform stepped forward sternly.

"Hand over your watch," he demanded.

Shaking palpably Rainham complied.

Glancing at the timepiece the officer pocketed it. He placed a hand on Rainham's shoulder.

"Rupert Rainham, I hold you for the murder of John Cranhouse. You have sworn that the car went over the curve at 8.10. Every wound on Cranhouse's body was found bloodless. That means that he was dead *before* his car leaped the curve. But that isn't all! The clock on the dash of the wrecked car *stopped at* 7.25. The dead man's chauffeur has testified that he set the clock in the dash by Western Union shortly before Mr. Cranhouse left his garage. The dead man was particular about the exact time. I saw your secretary before ringing your bell. He swears that you set your watch by his, late this afternoon. His time was also identical with Western Union. Your watch is still correct. The clock in the death-car did not lie—*but you did.* Why? To conceal your guilty knowledge and to provide yourself with a time alibi if necessary. For you were at the curve at 7.25!"

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BUT WHO WILL?

(*In metaphor libre*)

"THERE is no rose without a thorn"—
No life without its sorrow;
Of Hope Despair is often born
To blast our sweet To-morrow.

Plant where you will the tree of Bliss,
Its blossoms are a chain;
The fruit emits a serpent's hiss,
And your reward is Pain.

Ah, you had joy the other day,
My overblissful brother;
The Penalty you did not pay—
It fell upon another.

Impulsive souls cannot resist
Debauchery of Mirth
Who, wantonly, on being kissed,
To direst Woe gives birth.

Then seek Discretion's equipoise,
Which balances emotion
And weirs the stream of rippling Joys
Before it joins Grief's ocean.

James S. Ryan.



Tarzan and the Ant Men*

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of "Tarzan and the Golden Lion," "The Moon Maid," "Chessmen of Mars," etc.

CHAPTER XIX *(continued).*

JANZARA'S BOUDOIR.

TARZAN shook his head impatiently. "You do not love me," he said. "I am sorry that you think you do, for I do not love you. I have no time to waste. Come!" And he stepped closer to take her by the wrist.

"Are you mad?" she demanded. "Or can it be that you do not know who I am?"

"You are Janzara, daughter of Elkomoelhago," replied Tarzan. "I know well who you are."

"And you dare to spurn my love!" She was breathing heavily, her bosom rising and falling to the tumultuous urge of her emotions.

"It is no question of love between us," replied the ape-man. "To me it is only a question of liberty and life for myself and my companions."

"You love another?" asked Janzara.

"Yes," Tarzan told her.

"Who is she?" demanded the princess.

"Will you come quietly, or shall I be compelled to carry you away by force?"

For a moment the woman stood silently before him, her every muscle tensed, her dark eyes two blazing wells of fire, and then slowly her expression changed. Her face softened, and she stretched one hand toward him.

"I will help you, Zuanthrol," she said. "I will help you to escape. Because I love you I shall do this. Come! Follow me!" She turned and moved softly across the apartment.

"But my companions," said the ape-man. "I cannot go without them."

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"Where are they?"

He did not tell her, for as yet he was none too sure of her motives.

"Show me the way," he said, "and I can return for them."

"Yes," she replied, "I will show you, and then perhaps you will love me better than you love the other."

In the passage behind the paneling Talaskar and Komodoflorensal awaited the outcome of Tarzan's venture. Distinctly to their ears came every word of the conversation between the ape-man and the princess.

"He loves you," said Komodoflorensal. "You see, he loves you."

"I see nothing of the kind," returned Talaskar. "Because he does not love the Princess Janzara is no proof that he loves me."

"But he does love you—and you love him! I have seen it since first he came. Would that he were not my friend, for then I might run him through."

"Why would you run him through because he loves me—if he does?" demanded the girl. "Am I so low that you would rather see your friend dead than mated with me?"

"I—" he hesitated. "I cannot tell you what I mean."

The girl laughed and then suddenly sobered. "She is leading him from her apartment," she said. "We had better follow."

As Talaskar laid her fingers upon the spring that actuated the lock holding the panel in place, Janzara led Tarzan across her chamber toward a doorway in one of the side walls—not the doorway through which her slave had departed.

"Follow me," whispered the princess, "and you will see what the love of Janzara means."

Tarzan, not entirely assured of her intentions, followed her warily.

"You are afraid," she said. "You do not trust me. Well, come here then and look, yourself, into this chamber before you enter."

Komodoflorensal and Talaskar had but just stepped into the apartment when Tarzan approached the door to one side of which Janzara stood. They saw the floor give suddenly beneath his feet and an instant later Zuanthrol had disappeared. As he shot down a polished chute he heard a wild laugh from Janzara following him into the darkness of the unknown.

Komodoflorensal and Talaskar leaped quickly across the chamber, but too late. The floor that had given beneath Tarzan's feet had slipped quietly back into place. Janzara stood above the spot trembling with anger and staring down at the place where the ape-man had disappeared. She shook as an aspen shakes in the breeze—shook in the mad tempest of her own passions.

"If you will not come to me, you shall never go to another!" she screamed, and then she turned and saw Komodoflorensal and Talaskar running toward her.

What followed occurred so quickly that it would be impossible to record the facts in the brief time that they actually consumed. It was over almost before Tarzan reached the bottom of the chute and picked himself from the earthen floor upon which he had been deposited.

The room in which he found himself was lighted by several candles burning in iron barred niches. Opposite him was a heavy gate of iron bars, through which he could see another lighted apartment in which a man, his chin sagging dejectedly upon his breast, was seated on a low bench. At the sound of Tarzan's precipitate entrance into the adjoining chamber the man looked up, and, at sight of Zuanthrol, leaped to his feet.

"Quick! To your left!" he cried; and Tarzan, turning, saw two huge, green eyed beasts crouching to spring.

His first impulse was to rub his eyes as one might to erase the phantom figures of a disquieting dream, for what he saw were two ordinary African wildcats—ordinary in coutour and markings, but in size gigantic. For an instant the ape-man forgot that he was only one-fourth his normal size and that the cats, which appeared to him as large as full grown lions, were in reality but average specimens of their kind.

As they came toward him he whipped out his sword, prepared to battle for his

life with these great felines as he had so often before with their mighty cousins of his own jungle.

"If you can hold them off until you reach this gate," cried the man in the next chamber, "I can let you through. The bolt is upon this side." But even as he spoke one of the cats charged.

Komodoflorensal, brushing past Janzara, leaped for the spot upon the floor at which Tarzan had disappeared, and as it gave beneath him he heard a savage cry break from the lips of the Princess of Veltoptismakus.

"So it is you he loves?" she screamed. "But he shall not have you—no, not even in death!" And that was all that Komodoflorensal heard as the chute swallowed him.

Talaskar, confronted by the infuriated Janzara, halted, and then stepped back, for the princess was rushing upon her with drawn dagger.

"Die, slave!" she screamed, as she lunged for the white breast of Talaskar; but the slave girl caught the other's wrist, and a moment later they dropped, locked in each other's embrace. Together they rolled about the floor, the daughter of Elkomoelhago seeking to drive her slim blade into the breast of the slave girl, while Talaskar fought to hold off the menacing steel and to close with her fingers upon the throat of her antagonist.

As the first cat charged, the other followed, not to be robbed of its share of the flesh of the kill, for both were ravenous, and as the ape-man met the charge of the first, sidestepping its rush and springing in again to thrust at its side, Komodoflorensal, who had drawn his sword as he entered the apartment of Janzara, shot into the subterranean den almost into the teeth of the second beast. This savage cat was so disconcerted by the sudden appearance of a second human that it wheeled and sprang to the far end of the den before it could gather its courage for another attack.

In the chamber above, Talaskar and Janzará fought savagely, two she-tigers in human form. They rolled to and fro about the room, straining and striking; Janzara screaming, "Die, slave! You shall not have him!"

But Talaskar held her peace and saved her breath, so that slowly she was overcoming the other when they chanced to roll upon the very spot that had let Tarzan and Komodoflorensal down to the pit beneath.

As Janzara realized what had happened she uttered a scream of terror. "The cats! The cats!" she cried; and then the two disappeared into the black shaft.

Komodoflorensal did not follow the cat that had retreated to the far end of the pit, but sprang at once to Tarzan's aid, and together they drove off the first beast as they backed toward the gate where the man in the adjoining chamber stood ready to admit them to the safety of his own apartment.

The two cats charged and then retreated, springing in quickly and away again as quickly, for they had learned the taste of the sharp steel with which the humans were defending themselves. The two men were almost at the gate, another instant and they could spring through. The cats charged again, and again were driven to the far corner of the pit. The man in the next chamber swung open the gate.

"Quick!" he cried; and at the same instant the two figures shot from the mouth of the shaft and, locked tightly in each other's embrace, rolled to the floor of the pit directly in the path of the charging cats.

CHAPTER XX.

FUGITIVES.

AS Tarzan and Komodoflorensal realized that Talaskar and Janzara lay exposed to the savage assault of the hungry beasts they both sprang quickly toward the two girls. As had been the case when Komodoflorensal had shot into the pit, the cats were startled by the sudden appearance of these two new humans, and in the first instant of their surprise had leaped again to the far end of the chamber.

Janzara had lost her dagger as the two girls had fallen into the shaft, and now Talaskar saw it lying on the floor beside her. Releasing her hold upon the princess, she seized the weapon and leaped to her feet. Already Tarzan and Komodoflorensal were

at her side, and the cats were returning to the attack.

Janzara arose slowly and half bewildered. She looked about, terror disfiguring her marvelous beauty, and as she did so the man in the adjoining chamber saw her.

"Janzara!" he cried. "My princess, I come!" And seizing the bench upon which he had been sitting, and the only thing within the chamber that might be converted into a weapon, he swung wide the gate and leaped into the chamber where the four were now facing the thoroughly infuriated cats.

Both animals, bleeding from many wounds, were mad with pain, rage and hunger. Screaming and growling, they threw themselves upon the swords of the two men, who had pushed the girls behind them and were backing slowly toward the gate, and then the man with the bench joined Tarzan and Komodoflorensal, and the three fought back the charges of the infuriated cats.

The bench proved fully as good a weapon of defense as the swords, and so together the five drew slowly back until, quite suddenly and without the slightest warning, both cats leaped quickly to one side and darted behind the party as if sensing that the women would prove easier prey. One of them came near to closing upon Janzara had not the man with the bench, imbued apparently with demoniacal fury, leaped upon it with his strange weapon and beaten it back so desperately that it was forced to abandon the princess.

Even then the man did not cease to follow it, but, brandishing the bench, pursued it and its fellow with such terrifying cries and prodigious blows that, to escape him, both cats suddenly dodged into the chamber that the man had occupied, and before they could return to the attack he with the bench had slammed the gate and fastened them upon its opposite side. Then he wheeled and faced the four.

"Zoanthrohago!" cried the princess.

"Your slave!" replied the noble, dropping to one knee and leaning far back with outstretched arms.

"You have saved my life, Zoanthrohago," said Janzara, "and after all the indignities that I have heaped upon you! How can I reward you?"

"I love you, princess, as you have long known," replied the man, "but now it is too late, for to-morrow I die by the king's will. Elkomoelhago has spoken, and, even though you be his daughter, I do not hesitate to say his very ignorance prevents him ever changing a decision once reached."

"I know," said Janzara. "He is my sire, but I love him not. He killed my mother in a fit of unreasoning jealousy. He is a fool—the fool of fools."

Suddenly she turned upon the others.

"These slaves would escape, Zoanthrohago," she cried. "With my aid they might accomplish it. With their company we might succeed in escaping, too, and in finding an asylum in their own land."

"If any one of them is of sufficient power in his own native city," replied Zoanthrohago.

"This one," said Tarzan, seeing a miraculous opportunity for freedom, "is the son of Adendrohahkis, King of Trohanadalmakus—the oldest son, and Zertolosto."

Janzara looked at Tarzan a moment after he had done speaking. "I was wicked, Zuanthrol," she said; "but I thought that I wanted you, and being the daughter of a king I have seldom been denied aught that I craved." And then, to Talaskar: "Take your man, my girl, and may you be happy with him." And she pushed Talaskar gently toward the ape-man; but Talaskar drew back.

"You are mistaken, Janzara," she said; "I do not love Zuanthrol, nor does he love me."

Komodoflorensal looked at Tarzan as if expecting that he would quickly deny the truth of Talaskar's statement, but the ape-man only nodded his head in assent.

"Do you mean," demanded Komodoflorensal, "that you do not love Talaskar?" And he looked straight into the eyes of his friend.

"On the contrary, I love her very much," replied Tarzan; "but not in the way that you have believed—or should I say feared? I love her because she is a good girl and a kind girl and a loyal friend, and also because she was in trouble and needed the love and protection which you and I alone could give her; but as a man loves his mate,

I do not love her, for I have a mate of my own in my country beyond the thorns."

Komodoflorensal said no more, but he thought a great deal. He thought of what it would mean to return to his own city where he was the Zertolosto, and where, by all the customs of ages, he would be supposed to marry a princess from another city. But he did not want a princess; he wanted Talaskar, the little slave girl of Veltoptismakus, who scarcely knew the name of her own mother and most probably had never heard that of her father.

He wanted Talaskar, but he could only have her in Trohanadalmakus as a slave. His love for her was real, and so he would not insult her by thinking such a thing as that. If he could not make her his princess, he would not have her at all; and so, Komodoflorensal, the son of Adendrohahkis, was sad.

But he had none too much time to dwell upon his sorrow now, for the others were planning the best means for escape.

"The keepers come down to feed the cats upon this side," said Zoanthrohago, indicating a small door in the wall of the pit opposite that which led into the chamber in which he had been incarcerated.

"Doubtless it is not locked, either," said Janzara, "for a prisoner could not reach it without crossing through this chamber where the two cats were kept."

"We will see," said Tarzan, and crossed to the door.

A moment sufficed to force it open, revealing a narrow corridor beyond. One after another the five crawled through the small aperture and, following the corridor, ascended an acclivity, lighting their way with candles taken from the den of the carnivores. At the top a door opened into a wide corridor, a short distance down which stood a warrior, evidently on guard before a door.

Janzara looked through the tiny crack that Tarzan had opened the door and saw the corridor and the man.

"Good!" she exclaimed. "It is my own corridor, and the warrior is on guard before my door. I know him well. Through me he has escaped payment of his taxes for the past thirty moons. He would die for me. Come! We have nothing to fear." And stepping boldly into the corridor, she approached the sentry, the others following behind her.

Until he recognized her there was danger that the fellow would raise an alarm, but the moment he saw who it was he was as wax in her hands.

"You are blind," she told him.

"If the Princess Janzara wishes it," he replied.

She told him what she wished—five diadets and some warriors' heavy wraps. He eyed those who were with her, and evidently recognized Zoanthrohago, and guessed who the two other men were.

"Not only shall I be blind for my princess," he said, "but to-morrow I shall be dead for her."

"Fetch six diadets, then," said the princess; and he understood her and smiled his gratitude.

Then she turned toward Komodoflorensal. "You are Prince Royal of Trohanadalmakus?" she asked.

"I am," he replied.

"And if we show you the way to liberty you will not enslave us?"

"I shall take you to the city as my own slaves and then liberate you," he replied.

"It is something that has seldom if ever been done," she mused; "not in the memory of living man in Veltoptismakus. I wonder if your sire will permit it."

"The thing is not without precedent," replied Komodoflorensal. "It has been done but rarely, yet it *has* been done. I think you may feel assured of a friendly welcome at the court of Adendrohahkis, where the wisdom of Zoanthrohago will not go unappreciated or unrewarded."

It was a long time before the warrior returned with the diadets. His face was covered with perspiration and his hands with blood.

"I had to fight for them," he said, "and we shall have to fight to use them if we do not hurry. Here, prince, I brought you weapons," and he handed a sword and dagger to Zoanthrohago.

They mounted quickly. It was Tarzan's first experience upon one of the wiry, active little mounts of the Minunians, but he

found the saddle well designed and the diadet easily controlled.

"They will be following me from the King's Corridor," explained Oratharc, the warrior who had fetched the diadets. "It would be best, then, to leave by one of the others."

"Trohanadalmakus is east of Veltoptismakus," said Zoanthrohago, "and if we leave by the Women's Corridor with two slaves from Trohanadalmakus they will assume that we are going there; but if we leave by another corridor they will not be sure, and if they lose even a little time in starting the pursuit it will give us just that much of an advantage. If we go straight toward Trohanadalmakus we shall almost certainly be overtaken, as the swiftest of diadets will be used in our pursuit.

"Our only hope lies in deceiving them as to our route or destination, and to accomplish this I believe that we should leave either by the Warriors' Corridor or the Slaves' Corridor, cross the hills north of the city, circle far out to the north and east, not turning south until we are well past Trohanadalmakus. In this way we can approach that city from the east while our pursuers are patrolling the country west of Trohanadalmakus to Veltoptismakus."

"Let us leave by the Warriors' Corridor, then," suggested Janzara.

"The trees and shrubbery will conceal us while we pass around to the north of the city," said Komodoflorensal.

"We should leave at once," urged Oratharc.

"Go first, then, with the princess," said Zoanthrohago, "for there is a possibility that the guard at the entrance will let her pass with her party. We will muffle ourselves well with our warriors' cloaks. Come, lead the way!"

With Janzara and Oratharc ahead and the others following closely, they moved at a steady trot along the circular corridor toward the Warriors' Corridor, and it was not until they had turned into the latter that any sign of pursuit developed. Even then, although they heard the voices of men behind them, they hesitated to break into a faster gait lest they arouse the suspicions of the warriors in the guard room which they must pass near the mouth of the corridor.

Never had the Warriors' Corridor seemed so long to any of the Veltoptismakusians in the party as it did this night; never had they so wished to race their diadets as now; but they held their mounts to an even pace that would never have suggested to the most suspicious that here were six persons seeking escape, most of them from death.

They had come almost to the exit when they were aware that the pursuit had turned into the Warriors' Corridor behind them, and that their pursuers were advancing at a rapid gait.

Janzara and Oratharc drew up beside the sentry at the mouth of the corridor as he stepped out to bar their progress.

"The Princess Janzara!" announced Oratharc. "Aside for the Princess Janzara!"

The princess threw back the hood of the warrior's cloak she wore, revealing her features, well known to every warrior in the Royal Dome—and well feared. The fellow hesitated.

"Aside, man," cried the princess, "or I ride you down!"

A great shout arose behind them. Warriors on swiftly galloping diadets leaped along the corridor toward them. The warriors were shouting something, the sense of which was hidden by the distance and the noise, but the sentry was suspicious.

"Wait until I call the Novand of the Guard, princess," he cried. "Something is amiss, and I dare let no one pass without authority; but wait! here he is." And the party turned in their saddles to see a Novand emerging from the door of the guard room, followed by a number of warriors.

"Ride!" cried Janzara, and spurred her diadet straight for the single sentry in their path.

The others lifted their mounts quickly in pursuit. The sentry went down, striking valiantly with his rapier at the legs and bellies of flying diadets. The Novand and his men rushed from the guard room just in time to collide with the pursuers, whom they immediately assumed were belated members of the fleeing party. The brief

minutes that these fought, before explanations could be made and understood, gave the fugitives time to pass among the trees to the west side of the city, and, turning north, make for the hills that were dimly visible in the light of a clear but moonless night.

Oratharc, who said that he knew the hill trails perfectly, led the way, the others following as closely as they could; Komodoflorensal and Tarzan bringing up the rear. Thus they moved on in silence through the night, winding along precipitous mountain trails, leaping now and again from rock to rock where the trail itself had been able to find no footing; sliding into dank ravines, clambering through heavy brush and timber along tunnel-like trails that followed their windings, or crept up their opposite sides to narrow ridge or broad plateau; and all night long no sign of pursuit developed.

The morning came at last, and with it, from the summit of a lofty ridge, a panorama of broad plain stretching to the north, of distant hills, of forests, and of streams. They decided then to descend to one of the numerous parklike glades that they could see nestling in the hills below them, and there rest their mounts and permit them to feed, for the work of the night had been hard upon them.

They knew that in the hills they might hide almost indefinitely, so wild and so little traveled were they, and so they went into camp an hour after sunrise in a tiny cup-like valley surrounded by great trees, and watered and fed their mounts with a sense of security greater than they had felt since they left Veltoptismakus.

Oratharc went out on foot and killed a couple of quail, and Tarzan speared a large fish in the stream. These they prepared and ate, and then, the men taking turns on guard, they slept until afternoon, for none had had sleep the night before.

Taking up their flight again in mid-afternoon, they were well out upon the plain when darkness overtook them. Komodoflorensal and Zoanthrohago were riding on the flanks, and all were searching for a suitable camping place. It was Zoanthrohago who found it, and when they all gathered about him Tarzan saw nothing in the waning light of day that appeared any more like a good camping place than any other spot on the open plain. There was a little clump of trees, but they had passed many such clumps, and there was nothing about this one that appeared to offer any greater security than another.

As a matter of fact, to Tarzan it was anything but a desirable camp site. There was no water; there was little shelter from the wind and none from an enemy; but perhaps they were going into the trees. That would be better. He looked up at the lofty branches lovingly. How enormous these trees seemed! He knew them for what they were, and that they were trees of only average size, yet to him now they reared their heads aloft like veritable giants.

"I will go in first," he heard Komodoflorensal say, and turned to learn what he referred to.

The three other men were standing at the mouth of a large hole, into which they were looking. Tarzan knew that the opening was the mouth of the burrow of a ratel, the African member of the badger family, and he wondered why any of them wished to enter it.

Tarzen had never cared for the flesh of the ratel. He stepped over and joined the others, and as he did so he saw Komodoflorensal crawl into the opening, his drawn sword in his hand.

"Why is he doing that?" he asked Zoanthrohago.

"To drive out or kill the cambon, if he is there," replied the prince, giving the ratel its Minunian name.

"And why?" asked Tarzan. "Surely you do not eat its flesh?"

"No, but we want its home for the night," replied Zoanthrohago. "I had forgotten that you are not a Minunian. We will spend the night in the underground chambers of the cambon, safe from the attacks of the cat or the lion. It would be better were we there now—this is a bad hour of the night for Minunians to be abroad on the plain or in the forest, for it is at this hour that the lion hunts."

A few minutes later Komodoflorensal

emerged from the hole. "The cambon is not there," he said. "The burrow is deserted. I found only a snake, which I killed. Go in, Oratharc, and Janzara and Talaskar will follow you. You have candles?"

They had, and one by one they disappeared into the mouth of the hole, until Tarzan, who had asked to remain until last, stood alone in the gathering night, gazing at the mouth of the ratel's burrow, a smile upon his lips. It seemed ridiculous to him that Tarzan of the Apes should ever be contemplating hiding from Numa in the hole of a ratel, or, worse still, hiding from little Skree, the wildcat. And, as he stood there smiling, a bulk loomed dimly among the trees; the diadets, standing near, untethered, snorted and leaped away; and Tarzan wheeled to face the largest lion he ever had seen—a lion that towered more than twice the ape-man's height above him.

How tremendous, how awe-inspiring Numa appeared to one the size of a Minunian!

The lion crouched, its tail extended, the tip moving ever so gently, but the ape-man was not deceived. He guessed what was coming, and even as the great cat sprang he turned and dove head foremost down the hole of the ratel. Behind him rattled the loose earth pushed into the burrow's mouth by Numa as he alighted upon the spot where Tarzan had stood.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SON OF THE FIRST WOMAN.

FOR three days the six traveled toward the east and then, upon the fourth, they turned south. A great forest loomed upon the distant southern horizon, sweeping also wide upon the east. To the southwest lay Trohanadalmakus, a good two days' journey for their tired diadets.

Tarzan often wondered what rest the little creatures obtained. At night they were turned loose to graze, but his knowledge of the habits of the carnivora assured him that the tiny antelope must spend the greater part of each night in terrified watching or in flight, yet every morning they were back at the camp awaiting the pleasure of their masters.

That they did not escape, never to return, is doubtless due to two principal facts. One is that they have been for ages bred in the domes of the Minunians—they know no other life than with their masters, to whom they look for food and care—and the other is the extreme kindness and affection which the Minunians accord their beautiful beasts of burden, and which have won the love and confidence of the little animals to such an extent that the diadet is most contented when in the company of man.

It was during the afternoon of the fourth day of their flight that Talaskar suddenly called their attention to a small cloud of dust far to their rear. For a while all six watched it intently as it increased in size and drew nearer.

"It may be the long awaited pursuit," said Zoanthrohago.

"Or some of my own people from Trohanadalmakus," suggested Komodoflorensal.

"Whoever they are they greatly outnumber us," said Janzara, "and I think we should find shelter until we know their identity."

"We can reach the forest before they overtake us," said Oratharc, "and in the forest we may elude them if it is necessary to do so."

"I fear the forest," said Janzara.

"We have no alternative," said Zoanthrohago; "but even now I doubt that we can reach it ahead of them. Come, we must be quick!"

Never before had Tarzan of the Apes covered ground so rapidly upon the back of an animal. The diadets flew through the air in great bounds. Behind them the nucleus of the dust cloud had resolved itself into a dozen mounted warriors, against whom their four blades would be helpless. Their one hope, therefore, lay in reaching the forest ahead of their pursuers, and now it appeared that they would be successful and now it appeared that they would not.

The recently distant wood seemed rushing toward him as Tarzan watched ahead between the tiny horns of his graceful

mount, and, behind, the enemy was gaining. They were Veltoptismakusians—they were close enough now for the devices upon their helmets to be seen—and they had recognized their quarry for they cried aloud upon them to stop, calling several of them by name.

One of the pursuers forged further ahead than the others. He came now close behind Zoanthrohago, who rode neck and neck with Tarzan in the rear of their party. A half length ahead of Zoanthrohago was Janzara. The fellow called aloud to her.

"Princess!" he cried. "The king's pardon for you all if you return the slaves to us. Surrender and all will be forgiven."

Tarzan of the Apes heard and he wondered what the Veltoptismakusians would do. It must have been a great temptation, and he knew it. Had it not been for Talaskar he would have advised them to fall back among their friends, but he would not see the slave girl sacrificed. He drew his sword then and dropped back beside Zoanthrohago, although the other never guessed his purpose.

"Surrender and all will be forgiven!" shouted the pursuer again.

"Never!" cried Zoanthrohago.

"Never!" echoed Janzara.

"The consequences are yours," cried the messenger, and on they rushed, pursuers and pursued, toward the dark forest, while from just within its rim savage eyes watched the mad race and red tongues licked hungry lips in anticipation.

Tarzan had been glad to hear the reply given by both Zoanthrohago and Janzara whom he had found likable companions and good comrades. Janzara's whole attitude had changed since the very instant she had joined them in their attempted escape.

No longer was she the spoiled daughter of a despot, but a woman seeking happiness through the new love that she had found, or the old love that she had but just discovered, for she often told Zoanthrohago that she knew now that she always had loved him. And this new thing in her life made her more considerate and loving of others.

She seemed now to be trying to make up to Talaskar for the cruelty of her attack upon her when she had first seen her. Her mad infatuation for Tarzan she now knew in its true light—because she had been refused him she wanted him, and she would have taken him as her prince to spite her father, whom she hated.

Komodoflorensal and Talaskar always rode together, but no words of love did the Trohanadalmakusian speak in the ear of the little slave girl. A great resolve was crystallizing in his mind, but it had as yet taken on no definite form. And Talaskar, happy just to be near him, rode blissfully through the first days of the only freedom she had ever known, but now all was forgotten except the instant danger of capture and its alternative concomitants, death or slavery.

The six urged their straining mounts ahead. The forest was so near now. Ah, if they could but reach it! There, one warrior might be as good as three and the odds against them would be reduced, for in the forest the whole twelve could not engage them at once and by careful maneuvering they doubtless could separate their pursuers.

They were going to make it! A great shout arose to the lips of Oratharc as his diadet leaped into the shadows of the first trees, and the others took it up, for a brief instant, and then it died upon their lips as they saw a giant hand reach down and snatch Oratharc from his saddle. They tried to stop and wheel their mounts, but it was too late.

Already they were in the forest and all about them was a horde of the hideous Zertalocolols. One by one they were snatched from their diadets, while their pursuers, who must have seen what was taking place just inside the forest, wheeled and galloped away.

Talaskar, writhing in the grip of a she Alali, turned toward Komodoflorensal.

"Good-by!" she cried. "This, at last, is the end, but I can die near you and so I am happier dying than I have been living until you came to Veltoptismakus."

"Good-by, Talaskar!" he replied. "Living I dared not tell you, but dying I can proclaim my love. Tell me that you love me."

"With all my heart, Komodoflorensal!" They seemed to have forgotten that another existed but themselves. In death they were alone with their love.

Tarzan found himself in the hand of a male and he also found himself wondering, even as he faced certain death, how it occurred that this great band of male and female Alali should be hunting together, and then he noticed the weapons of the males. They were not the crude bludgeon and the slinging stones that they had formerly carried, but long, trim spears, and bows and arrows.

And now the creature that held him had lifted him even with his face and was scrutinizing him and Tarzan saw a look of recognition and amazement cross the bestial features, and he, in turn, recognized his captor. It was the son of the First Woman.

Tarzan did not wait to learn the temper of his old acquaintance. Possibly their relations were altered now. Possibly they were not. He recalled the doglike devotion of the creature when last he had seen him and he put him to the test at once.

"Put me down!" he signed, peremptorily. "And tell your people to put down all of my people. Harm them not!"

Instantly the great creature set Tarzan gently upon the ground and immediately signaled his fellows to do the same with their captives. The man did immediately as they were bid and all of the women but one. She hesitated. The son of the First Woman leaped toward her, his spear raised like a whip, and the female cowered and set Talaskar down upon the ground.

Very proud, the son of the First Woman explained to Tarzan as best he could the great change that had come upon the Alali since the ape-man had given the men weapons and the son of the First Woman had discovered what a proper use of them would mean to the males of his kind. Now each male had a woman cooking for him—at least one, and some of them, the stronger, had more than one.

To entertain Tarzan and to show him what great strides civilization had taken in the land of the Zertalacolols, the son of the First Woman seized a female by the hair and, dragging her to him, struck her heavily about the head and face with his clenched fist, and the woman fell upon her knees and fondled his legs, looking wistfully into his face, her own eloquent with love and admiration.

That night the six slept in the open surrounded by the great Zertalacolols and the next day they started across the plain toward Trohanadalmakus where Tarzan had resolved to remain until he regained his normal size, when he would make a determined effort to cut his way through the thorn forest to his own country.

The Zertalacolols went a short distance out into the plain with them, and both men and women tried in their crude, savage way, to show Tarzan their gratitude for the change that he had wrought among them, and the new happiness he had given them.

Two days later the six fugitives approached the domes of Trohanadalmakus. They had been seen by sentries when they were still a long way off, and a body of warriors rode forth to meet them, for it is aways well to learn the nature of a visitor's business in Minuni before he gets too close to your home.

When the warriors discovered that Komodoflorensal and Tarzan had returned they shouted for joy and a number of them galloped swiftly back to the city to spread the news.

The fugitives were conducted at once to the throne room of Adendrohahkis and there that great ruler took his son in his arms and wept, so great was his happiness at having him returned safely to him. Nor did he forget Tarzan, although it was some time before he or the other Trohanadalmakusians could accustom themselves to the fact that this man, no bigger than they, was the giant who had dwelt among them a few moons since.

Adendrohahkis called Tarzan to the foot of the throne and there, before the nobles and warriors of Trohanadalmakus, he made him a zertol, or prince, and he gave him diadets and riches and allotted him quarters fitted to his rank, begging him to stay among them always.

Janzara, Zoanthrohago, and Oratharc he gave their liberty and permission to remain in Trohanadalmakus, and then Komodo-

florensal drew Talaskar to the foot of the throne.

"And now for myself I ask a boon, Adendrohahkis," he said. "As Zertolosto, I am bound by custom to wed a prisoner princess taken from another city; but in this slave girl have I found the one I love. Let me renounce my rights to the throne and have her instead."

Talaskar raised her hand as if to demur, but Komodoflorensal would not let her speak, and then Adendrohahkis arose and descended the steps at the foot of which Talaskar stood and, taking her by the hand, led her to a place beside the throne.

"You are bound by custom only, Komodoflorensal," he said, "to wed a princess, but custom is not law. A Trohanadalmakusian may wed whom he pleases."

"And even though he were bound by law," said Talaskar, "to wed a princess, still might he wed me, for I am the daughter of Talaskhago, King of Mandalamakus. My mother was captured by the Veltoptismakusians but a few moons before my birth, which took place in the very chamber in which Komodoflorensal found me.

"She charged me to take my life before mating with any one less than a prince, but I would have forgotten her teachings had Komodoflorensal been but the son of a slave.

"That he was the son of a king I did not dream until the night we left Veltoptismakus, and I had already given him my heart long before, although he did not know it."

Weeks passed, and still no change came to Tarzan of the Apes. He was happy in his life with the Minunians, but he longed for his own people and the mate who would be grieving for him, and so he determined to set forth as he was, pass through the thorn forest, and make his way toward home, trusting to chance that he might escape the countless dangers that would infest his way. Perhaps he would come to his normal size somewhere during the long journey.

His friends sought to dissuade him, but he was determined, and at last, brooking no further delay, he set out toward the southeast in the direction that he thought lay the point where he had entered the land of the Minuni. A kamak, a body consisting of one thousand mounted warriors, accompanied him to the great forest, and there, after some days' delay, the son of the First Woman found him. The Minunians bade him good-by, and as he watched them ride away upon their graceful mounts something arose in his throat that only came upon those few occasions in his life that Tarzan of the Apes knew the meaning of homesickness.

The son of the First Woman and his savage band escorted Tarzan to the edge of the thorn forest. Farther than that they could not go. A moment later they saw him disappear among the thorns, with a wave of farewell to them.

For two days Tarzan, no larger than a Minunian, made his way through the thorn forest. He met small animals that now were large enough to be dangerous to him, but he met nothing that he could not cope with. By night he slept in the underground dens of the larger burrowing animals. Birds and eggs formed his food supply.

During the second night he awoke with a feeling of nausea suffusing him. A premonition of danger assailed him. It was dark as the grave in the burrow he had selected for the night.

Suddenly the thought smote him that he might be about to pass through the ordeal of regaining his normal stature. To have this thing happen while he lay buried in this tiny burrow would mean death, for he would be crushed or suffocated before he regained consciousness.

Already he felt dizzy, as one might feel who was upon the verge of unconsciousness. He stumbled to his knees and clawed his way up the steep acclivity that led to the surface. Would he be able to reach it in time?

He stumbled on, and then, abruptly, a burst of fresh night air smote his nostrils. He staggered to his feet. He was out! He was free!

Behind him he heard a low growl. Grasping his sword, he lunged forward among the thorn trees. How far he went, or in what direction, he did not know, but as he ran he instinctively tore his clothing from his

feverish body. It was still dark when he stumbled and fell unconscious to the ground.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RIVER DEVIL.

KHAMIS, the witch doctor, searched untiringly for Uhha, his young daughter. A tribal rumor had arisen that a River Devil had stolen her from their home village of Obebe, the cannibal. The father suspected that a ravenous lion or a marauding leopard had taken the child, but he doggedly made pilgrimages to other villages, some of them remote from his own country. So far, he had found no slightest trace of the girl or her abductor.

Khamis was returning from another fruitless search that had extended far to the east of the village of Obebe, skirting the Great Thorn Forest a few miles north of the Ugogo. It was early morning. He had just broken his lonely camp and set out upon the last leg of his homeward journey when his keen old eyes discovered something unusual lying at the edge of a small open space a hundred yards away.

He did not know what it was, but instinct bade him to investigate. Cautiously moving nearer, he presently identified the thing as a human knee showing above the low grass that covered the clearing. He crept closer, and suddenly his eyes narrowed and his breath made a single, odd little sound as it sucked rapidly between his lips in mechanical reaction to surprise.

For that which he saw was the body of what could be naught but a River Devil—a naked, brown skinned, beautifully proportioned man; which is one of the water fiend's disguises, of course. It was upon its back with one knee flexed—the knee that he had seen above the grasses.

His spear advanced and ready, he approached until he stood above the motionless form. Was the River Devil dead, or was he asleep? Placing the point of his spear against the brown breast, Khamis prodded. The Devil did not awaken. He was not asleep, then; nor did he appear to be dead. Khamis knelt and placed an ear above the creature's heart. He was not dead!

The witch doctor thought quickly. In his heart he did not believe in River Devils, yet there was a chance that there might be such things, and perhaps this one was shamming unconsciousness, or temporarily absent from the flesh it assumed as a disguise so that it might go among men without arousing suspicion.

But, too, it probably was the abductor of his missing daughter. That thought filled him with rage and with courage. He must force the truth from those lips even though the creature were a fiend.

He unwound a bit of fiber rope from about his waist and, turning the helpless form over, quickly bound the wrists behind it. Then he sat down beside it to wait. An hour passed before signs of returning consciousness appeared, then the River Devil opened his eyes and looked up at Khamis.

"Where is Uhha, my daughter?" demanded the witch doctor.

The River Devil tried to free his arms, but they were too tightly bound. He made no reply to Khamis's question. It was as if he had not heard it. He ceased struggling and lay back again, resting. After a while he opened his eyes once more and lay looking at Khamis; but he did not speak.

"Get up!" commanded the witch doctor, and prodded him with a spear.

The River Devil rolled over on his side, flexed his right knee, raised on one elbow and finally got to his feet. Khamis prodded him in the direction of the trail. Toward dusk they arrived at the village of Obebe, the cannibal.

When the warriors and the women and the children saw what Khamis was bringing to the village they became very much excited, and had it not been for the witch doctor, of whom they were afraid, they would have knifed and stoned the prisoner to death before he was fairly inside the village gates; but Khamis did not want the River Devil killed—not yet.

He wanted first to force from him the truth concerning Uhha. So far he had been unable to get a word out of his prisoner. Incessant questioning, emphasized by many

prods of the spear point, had elicited nothing.

Khamis led his prisoner into a hut, bound him even more securely, and placed two warriors on guard. Obebe came to see him. He, too, questioned him, but the River Devil only looked blankly in the face of the chief.

"I will make him speak," said Obebe. "After we have finished eating we will have him out and make him speak. I know many ways."

"You must not kill him," said the witch doctor. "He knows what became of Uhha, and until he tells me no one shall kill him."

"He will speak before he dies," said Obebe.

"He is a River Devil, and will never die," said Khamis, reverting to an old tribal controversy.

After the cannibals had eaten they heated irons in a fire near the hut of the witch doctor, who was squatting before the entrance working rapidly with numerous charms—bits of wood wrapped in leaves, pieces of stone, some pebbles, a zebra's tail.

Villagers were congregating about Khamis until presently the prisoner could no longer see him. A little later he was taken out and pushed roughly toward the hut of the witch doctor.

Obebe was there, as he saw after the guards had opened a way through the throng, and he stood beside the fire in the center of the circle. It was only a small fire; just enough to keep a couple of irons hot.

"Where is Uhha, my daughter?" demanded Khamis.

The River Devil did not answer. Not once had he spoken since Khamis had captured him.

"Burn out one of his eyes," said Obebe. "That will make him speak."

"Cut out his tongue!" screamed a woman.

"Then he cannot speak at all, you she fool!" cried Khamis.

The witch doctor arose and put the question again, but received no reply. Then he struck the River Devil a heavy blow in the face. Khamis had lost his temper, so that he did not fear even the sinister silence of this fiend.

"You will answer me now!" he screamed, and, stooping, he seized a red hot iron.

"The right eye first!" shrilled Obebe.

Suddenly the muscles upon the back and shoulders of the prisoner leaped into action, rolling beneath his brown hide. For just an instant he appeared to exert a terrific physical force, there was a snapping sound at his back as the strands about his wrists parted, and then steel-thewed fingers fell upon the right wrist of the witch doctor.

Blazing eyes burned into his. Khamis dropped the red hot rod, his fingers paralyzed by the pressure upon his wrist, and he screamed, for he saw death in the angry face of the river god.

Obebe leaped frantically to his feet. Warriors pressed forward—but not near enough to be within reach of the River Devil. They had never been certain of the safety of tempting fate in any such manner as Khamis and Obebe had been about to do. Now here was the result!

The wrath of the River Devil would fall upon them all. They fell back, some of them, and that was a cue for others to fall back. In the minds of all was the same thought: "If I have no hand in this, the River Devil will not be angry with me." Then they turned and fled to their huts, stumbling over women and children who were trying to outdistance their lords and masters.

Obebe turned now to flee, also, and the River Devil picked Khamis up and held him in his two hands high above his head, and ran after the chief. Obebe dodged into his own hut. He had scarce reached the center of it when there came a terrific crash upon the light, thatched roof, which gave way beneath a heavy weight. A body descending upon the chief filled him with terror.

The River Devil must have leaped in through the roof of his hut to destroy him! The instinct of self-preservation arose temporarily above his fear of the supernatural, for now he was convinced that Khamis had been right and the creature they had held prisoner was indeed the River Devil.

And Obebe drew the knife at his side and lunged it again and again into the creature that had leaped upon him, and when he knew that life was extinct he stood proudly erect and, dragging the body after him, stepped out of his hut into the light of the moon and the fires.

"Come, my people!" he cried. "You have nothing to fear, for I, Obebe, your chief, have slain the River Devil with my own hands," and then he looked down at the thing trailing behind him, and gave a gasp, and sat down suddenly in the dust of the village street. For the body at his heels was that of Khamis, the witch doctor.

His people came, and when they saw what had happened they said nothing, but looked terrified. Obebe examined his hut and the ground around it. He took several warriors and searched the village. The stranger had departed.

They went to the gates. These were closed, but in the dust before them was the imprint of naked feet—the naked feet of a white man. Then Obebe came back to his hut, where his frightened people stood waiting him.

"Khamis was mistaken," he said. "The creature was not the River Devil. It must have been the man that I have heard called Tarzan of the Apes, for only he could hurl Khamis so high above his head that he would fall through the roof of a hut, and only he could pass unaided over our gates."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SUBTLEST VIBRATION.

A WAZIRI, returning from the village of Obebe the cannibal, encountered a hungry python on the trail. In making a wide and discreet detour through the jungle, he discovered a human skeleton.

This find, in itself, was nothing remarkable. Many bones lie alongside savage trails in Africa.

But this skeleton caused him to pause. It was that of a child. Yet this alone was not enough to delay a warrior hastening through an unfriendly country back toward his own people.

But Usula, the spearman, had heard strange tales in the village of Obebe the cannibal where a vague hint had brought him in search of his beloved master, the Big Bwana. Obebe had promptly denied that he had seen or heard anything of the giant white man, Tarzan of the Apes. He spoke much and argumentatively of a River Devil, instead.

From other members of the tribe, however, the Waziri learned that the terrible creature whom the chief foolishly tried to torture had left in the dust the footprints of a white man, lacking the callouses and the prehensile, outspread toes of the natives. Usula, therefore, was on the lookout for any clew that would fit the story of Obebe, or give that cannibal chieftain the lie.

When he saw the small skeleton near the trail he recalled the story of the missing Uhha; poked among the bones with the blade of his spear and retrieved a copper necklace which a woman of the cannibal tribe had described as belonging to the daughter of the ill-fated witch doctor. And then Usula knew that Obebe had lied. A River Devil leaves behind no trace of the human victim.

So now the warrior renewed his eager search for the white man who had pressed straight, firm toes in the dust of Obebe's village path. This identification, coupled with the tale of his terrific strength, pointed to none other than Tarzan of the Apes.

Usula sought his missing master with all the hunting skill of his meat eating tribe. He climbed trees to take observations of the wide veldt where grazed the antelope herds.

If, miles away, he saw a flurried movement among the grazing animals he made his way there. But always the alarm had been from some beast of prey, perhaps a hunting leopard, or cheetah, or mayhap only the scent of lion brought down on the wind.

And ever the warrior cast a raging glance aloft at the arching sky to where the vultures moved in their sentinel circles. He had a sullen, bitter fear of seeing these slow, feathery windings turn into an aerial funnel that should touch the earth where Tarzan of the Apes might lie helpless or even beyond help.

Three days after finding the child's skeleton, as he moved silently along the trail close to the Great Thorn Forest he came suddenly to a halt, the hand grasping his heavy spear, tensing in readiness. In a little open place he saw a man, an almost naked man, lying upon the ground. The man was alive—he saw him move—but what was he doing?

Usula crept closer, making no noise. He moved around until he could observe the man from another angle and then he saw a horrid sight. This man was white and he lay beside the carcass of a long dead buffalo, greedily devouring the dried remnants of hide that clung to the bleaching bones.

The man raised his head a little, and Usula, catching a better view of his face, gave a cry of horror. Then the man looked up and grinned foolishly. It was the Big Bwana!

Usula ran to him and raised him upon his knees, but the man only smiled and grinned like an infant as yet without the power of speech.

At his side, caught over one of the horns of the buffalo, was the Big Bwana's golden locket with the great diamonds set in it. Usula replaced it about the master's neck.

He then built a strong shelter for him near by and hunted food, and for many days he remained until Tarzan's strength came back; but his mind did not come back, nor did his speech. And thus, in this condition, the faithful Usula led his master home.

They found many wounds and bruises upon his body and his head; some old, some new, some trivial, some serious; and they sent to England for a great surgeon to come out to Africa to seek to mend the poor thing that once had been Tarzan of the Apes.

The dogs that had once loved Lord Greystoke slunk uneasily from this brainless creature. Jad-bal-ja, the Golden Lion, growled when the man was brought near his cage.

Korak, the killer, paced the floor in dumb despair, for his mother was on her way from England, and what would be the effect upon her of this awful blow? He hesitated even to contemplate it.

The surgeon arrived first at the bungalow of the ape-man. He examined his patient at great length, paying particular attention to the skull. And the puzzled shaking of the scientist's head was an added terror to the hearts of Korak and Merriem, his wife.

Being a truly great surgeon, he did not operate at once. Instead, he discoursed learnedly of "fictitious imbecility," "amnesia," "aphasia," and the like, and then courteously translated the terms into common prases for his lay hearers.

"Tarzan has sustained some subtle shock," he declared, "and there probably is lacking only a slight vibration to restore him to his normal senses. You will observe that he has not the true signs of imbecility—his head does not loll on his neck; he does not drool at the mouth.

"His amnesia—loss of memory—is complete for the moment, as is his aphasia—loss of speech. As opposed to these disabilities is the fact **that he reacts swiftly** to a brusque touch or harsh sound.

"Undoubtedly, he fled for many hours in the jungle from pursuing beasts of prey and, perhaps, imaginary dangers until he dropped exhausted. Those hardships, however, do not account for his mental condition.

"I shall await the arrival of his wife before operating on the head."

Lady Greystoke was a tired and dusty traveler as she alighted before the rose embowered entrance of the bungalow. Korak, her son, would have detained her in the hope that his words of warning might prepare her for the worst. He had not dared to put all the truth in his cable and radio messages.

She gently put his hands aside.

"Take me to my man, at once!" she said, softly but imperiously.

Her distressed son motioned to Merriem and the surgeon to accompany them, and so the four entered the room where Tarzan of the Apes sat staring dully at the shining world visible through the window. He glanced with a blank air at the intruders, and turned again to his brainless contemplation.

"He does not know any of us," Korak whispered to his mother. "Wait until after the operation before you see him again. You can do him no good, and to see him this way is too hard a strain upon you."

Again Lady Greystoke calmly dieregarded the plea of her son. It was as if she instinctively knew more of the ailing human before her than did the great surgeon.

With a cautionary finger on her proud lips to enforce silence on the spectators, she stole silently toward the unsuspecting ape-man. Here she clapped her slender hands onto his eyelids and called out, laughingly:

"Guess!"

At the touch of these trembling, loving hands an electric shock appeared to course through Tarzan of the Apes. His lips spread in a smile, a human, understanding amusement; and he laughed the deep throated note of his normal days.

"As if I wouldn't know the touch of your fingers, my dear wife, in this world or the next!" he said triumphantly.

THE END

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THE SPOILERS

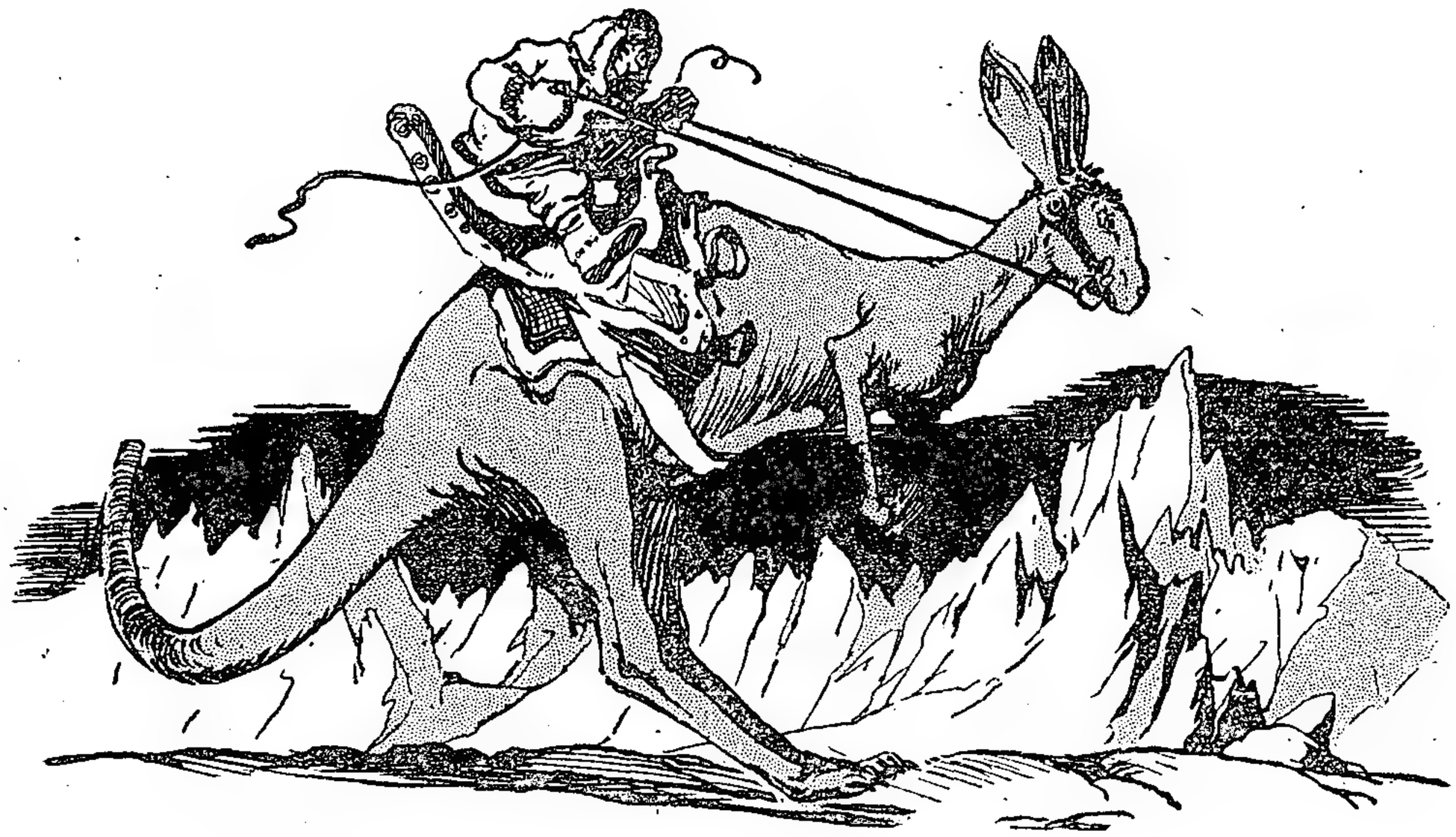
THE deer have left their forest feeding grounds,
And on the hill,
Where the last snows of winter linger still,
The muffled clamor of the ax resounds;
While from their reedy coverts flapping forth,
The wild duck seek the silence of the North.

The prophet pines that line the lichened ledge
Gaze grave below,
Where melt, like sunlit banks of springtime snow
The swift-receding miles of forest edge;
Where, nest-deserting on his northward flight,
A loon wails from the shadows of the night.

The plain's wind brings the reek of camp-smoke curled,
The stir of Man,
Who, cunning working since the earth began,
Slow-forged his mighty chain that binds the world;
To grip it close with groping, giant clutch,
And leave it scarred and broken at his touch.

But calm, serene, against their mountain throne,
The lone pines stand,
Unmarred by touch of Man's despoiling hand,
The yoke of his enslaving chain unknown;
While in their kingly hearts old visions rise
Of pine-pricked leagues and starry northern skies.

Martha Haskell Clark.



Josh Stebbins in Greenland

By A. D. TEMPLE

"IF this hot spell continners," said Mr. Stebbins one sweltering evening in July, seating himself on the front steps of Pat McGoogle's cut price grocery store, "I'm a goin' ter make another trip up to Central Greenland for the rest o' the summer."

"How're you going to git there? It's quite a ways, ain't it?" asked Link Brown.

"I dunno jest how, Link, I was thinkin' o' rentin' one o' them driverless planes from the Ariel Jitney Company in Chicagy, an' flyin' a straight line fer my old hangout, but I'm afeered they ain't got a machine with a tank big enough to carry gas fer the round trip. It took me an' Barney three years to git back from there before airyplanes was invented."

"Ef they ain't got the right kind of a machine, I'm goin' over to Montauk on Long Island an' buy a ticket to St. John's, Newfoundland, from the Northern Hydroplane Transportation Company on their local accommodation plane thet stops fer freight an' passengers at Boston, East Machias an' Halifax, an' from there runs a through express to St. John's; there's a line o' planes runnin' from there to So'th Greenland carryin' tourists for the summer trade to a hotel on Baffin Bay, whar they keep 'em on ice durin' the hot weather. When I git thar I reckon I ken hire a plane to take me the rest o' the way."

"You musta got up pretty near the North Pole, weren't you, Josh? How'd you happen to be cruising around that far north?" asked McGoogle.

"Sure we was! We was sitooated in the Syms's Hole kentry, thet the scientific sharps use ter say started at the foot o' the Pole, but when me an' Barney was up at the Pole itself we didn't find a sign of

it. Ef we hadn't got lost up in the no'th end o' Baffin Bay where we was huntin' an' tradin' with the Eskimos, we never woulda found it.

"Ye see, there's two poles up no'th, what they call the 'true pole' an' the 'magnetic pole.' The true pole ez jest ezackly under the No'th Star, but the magnetic pole lays about eight degrees soweast o' the true pole, an' the needle in the compass pints straight down, when ye git close to it; so ef ye steer by compass, without takin' the sun, ye git a long ways off yer course.

"'Bout halfway betwixt the two poles is Syms's Hole. Them scientists thet hed never seen it, sed thet it reached through the earth from no'th ter so'th an' thet a ship could sail through it, but 'tain't so. It's jest a kind o' o-way-sis in a desert of snow an' ice an' bad weather, all lumped up together."

"How did you come to find it?" asked some one.

"We was blowed inter it by a cyclone. Our ship, the Dancin' Jennie, a no'thern trader outa Halifax, got nipped in the ice, 'way up in the head o' Baffin Bay, jest ez we'd got our hold full o' furs, whalebone an' walrus hides, an' was ready ter steer fer home. The hull load went ter Davy Jones, I reckon, an' we hed ter strike out with our dog teams fer the so'th over the ice.

"In a big snowstorm, Barney an' me lost the rest o' the crew, but ez we hed plenty o' grub an' ammunition on our sleds, we didn't mind, an' kept on hikin' soweast by compass, but our compass wasn't right, ez we found when we run foul of a range o' mountains covered with snow an' ice, where we'd kalkalated ter find open water an' mebbe a whaler thet 'd take us aboard fer a passage back ter Halifax.

"It was hard scrabblin' to climb 'em, but we thought we'd find better travelin' on the other side; on top it was better goin', but we couldn't find a way to git down over the rim rock thet dropped off very steep on the far side, with the clouds so thick thet we couldn't make out what they was below 'em. Ez we was trailin' along the edge o' the drop-off, huntin' fer a break thet we could go down, all of a sudden a cyclone hit us, an' saved us the trouble. It blowed us, dogs, sleds, an' all, up in the air an' over the edge, end over end, till I lost my breath an' my senses, but never let go o' my rifle, nor I wa'n't aware of it when I landed.

"When I woke up an' opened my eyes, I was layin' on bare ground under a butternut tree, the sled was hangin' in the limbs of a beech tree with the dogs still hitched to it by their traces, thet jest let 'em git their feet on the ground an' saved 'em from bein' hung, but two of 'em was standin' with only their hind legs on the ground, an' they was mighty glad ter see me. The trees was in leaf an' there was green grass an' flowers with birds singin' in the trees, an' I found some ripe wild strawberries thet tasted mighty good after livin' on seal an' bear meat fer so long.

"Then I looked round fer Barney, but didn't find him till ez I was passin' under a tall pine tree thet didn't hev any limbs except a short, broken-off stub or two, fer sixty feet, an' looked like a ship's mast with a cedar bush on the top of it, when I heerd his voice.

"'Hello, Josh,' an' I looked all round in the brush, but couldn't locate him, when he hollered agen: 'Here I be. Look aloft, yer big bonehead, I'm up in the tree above yer!'

"'What yer doin' up there? Come on down,' I sez.

"'I'm here because I'm here; the durned wind blowed me here, but the dogs an' sled musta fallen somewhere else. Hain't you seen 'em?'

"'No,' I sez, 'but I ken hear 'em ki-yi'n' somewhere over in the brush. I reckon they're tangled up an' can't git loose. Come on down an' we'll hunt 'em up.'

"'How'm I goin' ter git down? I've been figurin' on it ever since I lit in this ere tree,' he asks me.

"'Why, climb down, ye lubber, I thought ye was a sailorman!'

"'Ef I could borry a parayshute it 'd be easy, but they ain't nary a rope to slide down on, an' the trunk is too thick ter git a grip on it with my arms round it; an' I ain't no squirrel ter stick on the bark with my nails.'

"'I donno how ye ever shipped ez A. B. an' can't come on deck from aloft,' I sez.

"'You got any terbaccer?' he asked me. 'I lost mine when I was flyin' through the air, I reckon.'

"'Come down outa there an' I'll give ye a chew. Yer too high up to toss up the plug.'

"'Ef I drop, how's the landin' below?'

"'There's a pile o' rock ter stabbo'rd an' a crab apple bush ter port; ef ye miss them ye ken take yer choice of failin' in a bog hole, or a blackberry patch.'

"Barney let out a groan ez he looked down an' seen I was tellin' him the truth.

"'D'ye reckon,' he sez, 'that I've got ter stay up this tree the rest o' my life an' be deprived of all the pleasant vices thet makes life wuth livin' in this vale o' tears?'

"'Yer talkin' like a deck swab,' I told him. 'Ain't ye got no sense? Take yer catridge belt an' git that round the tree, then with thet ye can git a grip on the trunk like the blacks do on the coconut trees in the islands, when they climb 'em.'

"He got the idee, an' shinned down the tree backward, like a bear, till when he was about forty foot from the ground his belt busted an' he fell, ketchin' by the seat of his seal hide breeches on a broken-off stub twenty foot up the tree, an' there he hung head down, clawin' the air.

"'How'm I goin' ter make the rest o' this trip?' he asked after he'd quit wriggin' and hung all sprawled out, like a bull frog floatin' in a pond.

"'Yer ken take yer choice,' I sez, 'of hangin' thar till I ken chop down some poles with my butcher knife an' make a ladder. It 'll take a couple o' days, I reckon, fer my knife is only made fer cuttin' meat an' skinnin', an' ain't no carpenter's tool. But ef yer impatient ter come down *pronto*, I ken shoot thet stuff off with my rifle an' drop ye ter the ground in two shakes of a lamb's tail.'

"'Am I hangin' over the crab apple tree, or the rock pile?' he axed me.

"'Yer right over the bog hole, an' it's good an' soft,' I sez.

"He shut his eyes an' I seen his lips movin' ez ef he was sayin' his prayers, then he opened 'em, an' spreadin' his hands out in front of him, like fer makin' a dive, he sez 'Shoot!' an' I shot. The ball cut the stub an' he landed in the bog hole with nothin' but his feet an' legs stickin' out, wavin' distress signals. My dogs come runnin' up at the shot, thinkin' I'd brought down a bear or some other varmint, an' not recognizin' him by his legs, thet was all they was of him in sight, they grabbed him, givin' me a lot o' trouble to kick 'em away an' pull Barney out before he was drowned. After I scraped the mud off so he could breathe an' took him to a spring ter wash the dirt outa his eyes an' ears thet was all plugged up with it we set down an' took a chew an' a drink o' water.

"When he was rested up a bit we went over ter where his dogs was yelpin' ter find the sled smashed ag'in' a tree with a dog layin' dead under it, while the others all tangled up in their traces, was howlin' ter git loose. Barney's rifle, also, was layin' there. Ez we seemed ter be out of the snow an' ice, sleds was no good an' we packed our dunnage on the dogs an' hiked fer it.

"We didn't know whar we was, nor whar we was bound, but we was on our way. The mountains behind us looked a heap higher'n the ones we'd seen from the coast, an' got blowed off of, an' it was hard ter believe they was the same ones, with sech a different climate, fer the country we was in was jest cool enough ter be pleasant, with plenty of wood an' water, and nuts an' berries growin' everywhere. We could kill a caribou any time we wanted meat, ez we seen 'em every day, so tame thet they'd stand an' look at us like gentle cattle ez we passed.

"All the bears I ever seen before hedn't a tail wuth speakin' of, but a bear charged us up there thet hed a tail three foot long, an' it stood up when he come at us like the tail of a mad bull. His meat was better'n the meat o' them ice bears, I reckon, because he mostly fed on fruit an' nuts an' roots instead o' fish an' seal meat.

"But the biggest diskivery in nacheral hist'ry thet we made was of a kinda wild goat thet ain't found nowhere, exceptin' on some sugar loaf mountain peaks up there. We called 'em 'Side-Hill Runners,' 'cause

they've been feedin' on them mountainsides so long thet their legs is shorter on one side than on the other, an' they can't stand up on level ground. We tried to ketch one, an' chased it round a couple of days on a mountain with a little flat on top. It jest run round an' round at the same level, an' we couldn't git near it, till one of us stood still an' waited fer it ter come round while the other chased it with the dogs. When it seen a man standin' in its trail it edged up the mountain a little higher every time it come round, an' o' course we kept follerin' it up till it made a sorta corkscrew trail ter the flat ground on top o' the mountain. When it got there it fell down an' died o' fright when it couldn't balance itself on its two longest legs, fer the short ones didn't tech the ground by three inches.

"I drawed a pickcher of it fer one o' them sharps with horn specs at the Noo York Mooseyum of Nacheral Hist'ry, an' after I told him what it was like, he wrote out its scientific name fer me, he called it the *Gyascutas Imposilissimus Stebbinii.* Then he shook hands with me an' told me thet I could count on him, ef I needed any help in bein' elected Grand Worthy High Priest of the Ancient Order of Annanias. I don't know any Latin an' didn't sabe jest what he was drivin' at, but I told him I guessed I could git elected without any o' his help, ef I wanted the job, an' he sed he thought so himself.

"But ez I was tellin' ye, when I happened ter remember thet mooseyum Smart Aleck, an' what he sed to me—we was skinnin' the Side-Hill Runner, an' hed a fire started ter brile some steaks, when Barney looked up an' sez:

"'Fer the luvva Mike, Josh, what's thet comin'?'

"An' about a mile away, flyin' low, was a big balloon with two people stickin' their heads over the edge o' the basket. We yelled an' fired our rifles signalin' to 'em the best we could, an' they saw us an' pulled the cord on the gas valve, bringin' down their machine ag'in' a big oak tree in a little flat at the foot o' the peak we was on. We run down to meet 'em an' found a man an' woman standin' by the side o' the basket. The man hed a gun in his hands an' seemed sorta leery of us, till we sed 'Howdy, stranger?' then he dropped the gun an' sprung a line o' French on us thet only Barney could sabe.

"After they'd jabbered an' gestured, specially the Frenchman, fer a while, an' the lady smilin' till she showed the fillin' in her back teeth, Barney turned ter me an' interduced me ter the pair of 'em.

"'Josh,' he sez, 'shake hands with Monseer Andray an' his wife from Paris. They're out No'th Pole huntin'.' I told him we ain't seen it anywhere round here an' are kinda mixed on our latitude an' longitude ourselves, fer this kentry looks like South Jersey, except there ain't no muskeeters an' no signs o' human bein's, they bein' the first we've seen since we lost our way an' got blowed inter unknown parts.

"The *monseer* was mighty perlite an' glad ter see us an' so was his wife. He sed we'd made ourselves famous in scientific circles an' thet Barney's name was a household word, an' mine soon would be ef I kept on.

"We invited 'em to dinner, which was straight wild goat meat an' a little hard tack; after we finished they brought out some shampain an' we got so friendly thet we agreed ter keep together. The *monseer* got out his instruments fer takin' scientific notes an' fust off took our elevation over sea level, findin' out after a heap o' kalkalatin' thet we was thirty-seven miles *below* the level o' the sea, an' there was a middlin' stiff down grade ahead of us, the way we was hikin'; then he took an observation ter know whar we was, reportin' 87 minutes 2 seconds no'th latitude an' 59 minutes 4 seconds longitude west from Greenwich. This showed us thet we was in a hole where the crust o' the earth was so thin thet the inside heat het up the hull country in spite of it bein' so near the pole.

"Monseer Andray could talk English a little, an' when he seen I didn't sabe his French, he talked it. He was all worked up after he got our position, an' depression insted of elevation.

"'We have,' he sed, 'make de gran' discovery. We are in de Hole.'

"'Yeah,' I sez, 'we sure be! Barney an' me hev been in it ever since our ol'

lugger got pinched in the ice. How'd ye reckon we ken git out?'

"'Monseer Stebbin', you not *comprend* what I tell you. We are in de Hole—de excavation—de deep profoundness of Syms, dat extends from de pole of de north to de pole of de south through de center of de earth.'

"'Barney, did you ever hear tell o' this Hole?' I hollered.

"'Yep, I heerd talk about it, but it sounded like a fairy story ter me, an' I didn't take no stock in it. We're in it now an' the question is how're we goin' ter climb out?'

"The long an' short of it was, we was down about forty miles in the mouth o' Syms's Hole, whoever he was? An' ef we kept a goin' we'd come out at the So'th Pole, ef we lived long enough. We allowed it was too long a trip, so we stopped right where we was an' built two cabins, one fer Andray an' one fer us an' went to ranchin'.

"We staid thar about two years an' was doin' well. We hed a herd of caribou and a bunch o' musk oxen, some of 'em gentle so we could plow with 'em; besides, Andray caught a couple of them long tailed bear cubs an' started a fur farm with 'em, his wife takin' care of it an' some silver foxes thet we'd trapped.

"On the range we had about five hundred head o' caribou an' eight hundred musk ox, besides a corral full of kangaroos, all gentled an' broke to saddle."

"Josh, what are you talking about? Kangaroos in Greenland! Why, kangaroos ain't known outside of Australia," interrupted Link Brown.

"Was you ever up in Greenland, Link?"

"No, I never was."

"Then how d'ye know they're only found in Australey? Ain't my repytation fer voracity in reportin' little known scientific facks enough ter prove thet they is kangaroos in No'th Central Greenland?"

"But, Josh, how could they have got there? Haven't you got them mixed up with some other animal that looks like them?" still objected Link.

"They ain't no other animal on earth thet looks like a kangaroo, an' after hevin' sailed the Seven Seas, an' hunted 'em in Australey, besides hevin' et gallons an' gallons o' canned kangaroo tail soup is it likely I'd make a mistake like thet? Ez fer how they got thar, I 'dunno, no more'n Jedge Stuffembunk, our Congressman, knowed about how come thet bottle of Old Crow whisky in his coat tail pocket thet fell out an' busted on the station platform when he got back from Washington, arter hevin' voted fer the Volstead law. Mebbe they jest growed thar, like the caribou an' musk ox; p'rh'ps a ship with a menagerie aboard got wrecked on the coast, an' they swum ashore an' got over the mountains. Monseer Andray sed he reckoned they musta come no'th through the Hole lookin' fer better grazin', because the feed at the So'th Pole is mighty poor, except fer seals and penguins."

"Say, Josh, what use did you have for them kangaroos that was broke to saddle?" came from Jed Styles, ex-aviator on the western front.

"We hed to hev 'em to round up our stock on the range, hosses is better fer the work an' easier to break an' ride, but they wasn't any, so we took the best we hed, which was kangaroos. Sailormen, ye know, always know how to accommodate themselves to circumstances."

"I guess that breaking them to ride was some job?"

"It sure was, Jed. It was like learnin' to fly, an' havin' yer machine hit the ground every twenty yards or so. I busted broncos one season fer the Wooden Spoon outfit in Montaney, an' I'll tell the world thet the wuss outlaw I ever straddled there was a tame kitten alongside of a buck kangaroo standin' twelve foot high, weighin' nine hundred pounds, more or less, bein' mounted fer the first time."

"What sort of saddles did you use?"

"They was special stock saddles thet we made ourselves, with a low horn, high cantle, double cinches, like Texas saddles, an' a crupper. Ye see, a kangaroo ain't built like a cow pony, so he needs a saddle with a crupper an' built on a special tree, ter suit his figger. A common stock saddle would go over the critter's head every time he landed from a sixty foot jump while herdin' caribou an' musk ox."

"What did you break them oxen to plow for? Did you raise any crops up there?" asked Jeff Tate.

"Wal, Andray hed some seed pertaties, an' rye in his balloon, an' we planted them an' got mighty good crops. We were doin' well ez fer ez crops an' stock was concerned, with plen'y of milk an' cheese with rye bread, deer meat an' wild beef thet hed a little musky taste to it, but fer men thet was used ter salt horse an' hard tack, it wasn't very fillin' ter say nothin' of hevin' ter chew willer bark insted o' plug terbaccer. Andray did make a little home brew, with rye an' spuds. It hed considerable kick to it, with a dozen headaches to the gallon, but it didn't have the taste thet good old barrel house stuff has. But me an' Barney wasn't built fer doin' the Robinson Crusoe stunt fer very long. We hankered fer a smell o' salt water an' a feed o' salt horse an' hard tack, with the taste o' tar in our mouths, with some good black navy plug fer smokin' an' chewin', insted o' willer bark, an' ter sit down to a little round table in a city front saloon fer a game o' seven-up, or Pedro fer the drinks, with the fiddles a squeakin' in the back room an' the boys dancin' an scrappin' every now an' then, jest fer the fun of it. Men off a lime juicer making sport o' our Yankee clippers, an' gittin' knocked out fer doin' it.

"We jest couldn't stand sech a quiet life ez we was livin', an' got ready to go."

"How did you manage to get back?" asked Pat McGoogle.

"Why, we rigged up a 'dirigible balloon' ez they call 'em, outa Andray's old gas bag. Wild geese an' swans bred every season on the ponds an' lakes all round us an' we hed tamed a lot of 'em an' trained 'em to tow us around in a canoe, they flyin' with a string hitched to their legs, an' we only had to steer it with the paddle.

"When in the fall they was gittin' ready to fly so'th fer the winter, we tied up about fifty of 'em, an' takin' the balloon over to where we'd found a spring o' this *hellyun* gas, I reckon they call it, thet won't explode, but has good liftin' power, we filled her up ez tight ez a drum. We loaded the basket of the old coach with lots o' grub an' plenty of dressed furs. We knowed the tails o' them long tailed bears would sell fine fer them boas thet ladies wears, an' we hed quite a bunch of silver fox pelts besides. We turned the ranch over to Andray to hold in trust fer us if we ever come back, an' takin' some papers thet he told us to deliver to the Polar Research Society of Paris, we hitched on our birds, an' cut loose the rope thet was holdin' us down. We shot up outa the Hole, forty miles below sea level, like a bat outa hell, the geese honking an' the swans trumpetin' with me an' Barney a singin' 'There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-Night.' A wind from the northeast caught us ez we passed over the rim o' the Hole an' we started so'th at more'n two hundred miles an hour, I reckon, fer we was above the clouds an' couldn't see nothin' below us, but hed plenty o' company, fer the air was full o' geese, swans, ducks, hawks, owls, an' other birds all bound so'th the same as we was an' all gabblin' and cacklin' in their own pertickler lingo.

"We musta run fer more'n two days without seein' the land below us or gettin' our bearin's, an' the birds was plumb tired wantin' to land an' take a rest an' git somethin' to eat, but we kept 'em at it till jest ez we was about a hundred miles from Galveston, in Texas, we come down outa the clouds to about a thousand feet above the earth, when all to once the hull bunch o' birds dropped their wings an' fell, dead from overwork, hangin' on their traces an' pullin' us down to the ground. We opened the valve to let out a leetle gas, but the valve stuck an' she emptied, lettin' us fall kersmash right in the middle of a colored camp meetin', jest ez the preacher was reachin' up his arms ter heaven an' prayin' the Lord to come down an' bless 'em. When them blacks seen it rainin' wild geese an' swans out of a clear sky an' the basket of the balloon smashed the pulpit, an' me an' Barney crawled out from under it dressed in bear an' musk ox hides, an' with three years' growth o' hair an' whiskers, since we last seen a barber, I reckon they thought he called up the wrong number, fer they all struck out fer the brush on a run an' I reckon some of 'em are runnin' yet."

THE SEA

IT moaned—moaned—moaned—
And sighing, sobbed, and sobbing, groaned
Like a despairing soul by God disowned.
The pallid green
Of its cloud-hung face despoiled the sheen
Of ruby and gold from sunset skies.
Its strangled cries
Were the chant of its drowned and dead, whose sighs
Forever and ever, through the day and the night,
Sound the knell of hope, of love and delight.
Its ghastly gray
Trailing mist choked into gloom the shining day.
It sobbed—sobbed—sobbed—
But it brought no rest to those it had robbed—
The dirge of the sea
When its wind-blown mists wrap you and me,
The relentless, cruel, terrible sea
With its brooding gloom and mystery.
And then—as the touch of a gentle hand,
A shimmer of rose bewitched the land
And spangled the foam that curled on the sand.
In a burst of flame
The cloud-caves shut, and crimsoned with shame
The drifting mist
Till it fled like a ghost the dawn had kissed.
Out to the west where the day hung low
In opaline tints and amethyst glow
Cradling the shadows hushed below,
The star-fires shot with radiant light
The altars of night.
And, lo! the peace of my beautiful sea
From its uttermost depths was crooned to me.
But I know—know—know—
That somewhere out beyond the glow,
Beneath the horizon's turquoise rim,
Lurk specters grim
Who will creep—creep—creep—
Through the stillness and dark when I may sleep,
And circle the shore with their great gaunt arms,
And ring the fog-bell's wild alarms,
And crash the storm on my window pane,
And hurl the sea down its mighty main
Waking the ghosts of its dead men's bones
With their moans—moans—moans.

R. Lee Guard.



The Trouble with Father

By WARREN SCHOLL

OLD man Snyder, with a piece of bread, carefully wiped a bit of spilled gravy from the red table-cloth. He poured his coffee from cup to saucer—and with all the deliberation of sixty-five years parted his hoary, tobacco stained whiskers and drank.

"For goodness' sake, dad, hurry! Ed's coming over to-night," chided Sarah, his daughter. "I'm waiting for your dishes."

Dad slowly drank his coffee, and said nothing. These young people were always in a hurry, he mused. Still, he must not complain. Suppose Sarah had no callers? How would she ever get a chance to marry?

"We're going to have a party," continued Sarah. "Ed will bring his saxophone, and the other boys have traps and violins."

The old man lowered his saucer, wiped his whiskers, and fathomed in his vest. He produced a stubby old pipe, and examined it.

"When you go to bed, dad, don't walk by the parlor if the bunch are here," cautioned Sarah.

The old man fumbled with his pipe. He placed his hand on the table, then rose and pottered about the cupboard.

"What are you hunting for?" asked Sarah.

"A piece of string. This mouthpiece is busted," explained her father, exhibiting the pipe in its several parts.

"Why don't you smoke that new pipe I bought you last Christmas? That thing is filthy."

"This one's good enough," he mumbled.

"I'll find you some string. Sit down. You're in the way. I want to put these dishes away."

Breathing hard, he settled back in his old cracked armchair by the fire.

"Here's your string," and Sarah tossed it to him.

He adjusted his nickel rimmed spectacles, picked up the twine, and patiently wrapped it about the mouthpiece. Assembling the pipe, he heaved a long breath, as though a great problem had been solved. He filled the pipe, opened the stove door, stuck in a bit of paper, and withdrew it flaming. He lit the pipe, and leaned back smoking, like a whiskered, spectacled baby sucking on a burning pacifier. Then he realized Sarah had left.

Ed was coming again to-night, and there would be a party. Queer things young people did these days. Rattled tin cans and cow bells, and pounded a big drum, and called it music. How did they ever dance to it? The solution was too much for his imagination. He thought of his wife, Lizzie, who had gone, and sighed in relief. Perhaps Sarah would marry Ed. She was thirty-four. It was high time.

Then he could rest. The years he had labored would bring their reward. He would go into a home. Charley Foss and he could smoke and talk all day long. No more work at the shop. To think, he used to be the best machinist Mower had. Forty-eight years at Mower's. He and Mower had been schoolmates. Now Mower was a millionaire, and he was a sweeper. Mower rode in a limousine, and he walked to save car fare—saved to provide a fund for entering an old man's home. Well, we couldn't all be actors. Some of us must watch the show.

The doorbell rang. Sarah rushed downstairs.

"Hello, Ed!" he heard; then lower tones.

They had entered the parlor. The reflected light through the door increased in brilliancy. Sarah was burning more gas.

Again the doorbell rang.

"Hello, bunch!" he heard; then stamping of feet and the tonking of a tin bell.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!" thundered a drum.

"Make all the noise you want, bunch—nobody's home," announced Sarah.

A saxophone whined. Dad continued smoking.

A charivarical din stabbed the stillness.

"Bang! Twunk! Zing! Zing!"

The orchestra had started. On with the dance! Dad shook his head drearily. He was chilly. His pipe burned no longer. The room became colder and colder. The fire was going out. With watery eyes he watched the dying embers. The jazz band howled on. Then, his head bent forward, and, overcome with weariness, he fell asleep. He awoke shivering. The din had ceased. The parlor lights were extinguished. The stove was cold. His pipe clattered to the floor.

"Sarah!" he called hoarsely.

Mocking echoes answered.

"Sarah!" he repeated.

"What?" came Sarah's low voice from the parlor.

"I thought you had left," explained the old man.

"Well, I must run along," said Ed's voice.

Dad heard them go to the vestibule. Whatever took them so long? A chill wind swept from the opened door. Sarah returned, rushing.

"Dad, look! Ed and me are engaged! Ain't this swell?"

The old man trembled with excitement. Ed—Sarah engaged? She had a ring! His eyes narrowed to slits as he examined the glittering gem.

"It ain't very big, but Ed didn't have any more money," explained Sarah. "He got it at the hock shop for five bucks. Ain't it a peach?"

Dad looked up suddenly.

"You going to be married, Sarah?"

"Sure! May first. Ed wants to save enough money to last us for the first year on the farm."

"Farm?" asked the old man.

"Ed has a farm all paid for, dad. He bought it on installments. All he wants to do now is get enough money to tide us over until the farm pays. Oh, dad, I'll

live on a farm! Think of it! No more factory. Just Ed and me."

The old man's head bent.

Sarah wriggled her fingers beneath the light, intent on the sparkling ring.

"It's a real diamond, dad."

Her father was silent. Suddenly Sarah noted the cold stove.

"Gee whiz! The fire's out."

Her father seemed crushed. She saw him. Poor pop. Gently she touched his vein-embossed hand.

"Don't act like that, dad. You expected me to be married some time, didn't you?"

He nodded. He wanted to tell Sarah he was glad she was going to marry Ed—tell her it was well that Ed showed the good sense to wait until he had enough money—but all he said was:

"That is fine, Sarah—fine!"

A feeling of peace infolded him. How fortunate that he had saved that home fund. A few more weeks at Mower's, and the struggle would be over.

"Come on, better go to bed, dad," said Sarah quietly.

He rose and slowly ascended the stairs, each step creaking periodically beneath his tread. Reaching his darkened room, he seated himself and stared into space. Soon this home would be gone. Sarah could have the furniture, everything. He would enter another home, where they charged two hundred dollars. He had one hundred and eighty-eight. He was glad he hadn't told Sarah of this money. She was a good girl, but perhaps some necessity of hers might have weakened him.

Just think! No more work. No more early rising. They rose at eight where Charley was. Nothing to do but smoke and eat and sleep. No jazz bands. Perhaps Sarah would come and see him once in a while. Perhaps he would even be called "grandpop." At length he turned out the light and slept.

The following morning, when he got up, the sleet of a winter's storm beat against the windows. Five o'clock! Outside was still very dark. He woke Sarah—went downstairs and started a fire. Finally Sarah arrived and prepared breakfast.

"I won't have to work much longer, dad," she said. "Gosh! The gang at the factory will be wild when they learn I'm engaged. Wonder if they'll buy me a present?"

Sarah's enthusiasm aroused no thrill in her father. He pondered the time he had asked Lizzie to marry. What hopes! And the result—a burst bubble. Still, that was the way. He mustn't disillusion Sarah. She and Ed might be happy. Such things happened. He drank his coffee.

"What will you do after we're married, dad?" asked Sarah.

He finished drinking and answered: "I don't know."

No use telling Sarah about the home yet. Sarah fetched his overshoes and coat. He left the house and stumbled through the darkened streets. At six thirty he rang in his time-card. Then he went to work.

He mopped the office floor, emptied the waste baskets, and cleaned the cuspidors. Him, cleaning Mower's cuspidor! How he hated it! Well, that was the way. But it wouldn't be much longer. He dusted the desks, opened the radiator valves, and went to the shop. The floor was littered with scrap. Thousands of pieces he lifted to his little cart.

"Hello, dad!" called out one of the younger workmen. He smiled an acknowledgment. They all called him dad. They were nice fellows. Just like he had been. Once, they had difficulty with a piece of work, and his pride, as he explained, might have been experienced by a French private had Napoleon consulted him for battle plans.

Yes, they were a nice crowd, but he was sorry for them. They had yet to pay. He knew those glistening machines—knew they were to be feared. Many times he had heard a shriek and watched a chalk faced group gather. The gnarled finger stumps, the livid scars, he knew them. He had paid. Yes, and he would pay more, if he wasn't very, very cautious.

The whine of a slipping wood pulley always startled him. Those spinning gears, with teeth hungry for fingers—he'd be glad when he could leave all these behind. Wouldn't Mower be surprised when he

quit? Mower would miss him. The boys would miss him, too. But wouldn't it be the greatest thing in the world to quit?

So he mused each day. Weeks drifted by, until two months later, Sarah's wedding day, May first, was but two weeks off. The home fund was complete. Dad had saved two hundred dollars. The last day at the shop was reality. He punched in his time-card.

"I am doing this for the last time," he said to himself.

In the office he wielded the mop with gusto, and even hummed a tune. Him, sixty-five years old, and humming a tune! But why not? Had he not triumphed? The desks were never so carefully dusted. He handled Mower's cuspidor almost affectionately. He polished its brazen surface until it glistened. He wondered who would do the job hereafter? He laid the cuspidor in the center of its rubber mat, as reverently as a queen might have placed her crown on its purple cushion.

"There," he said. "It's all done."

He chuckled mirthfully and paused at the door. One last look at the office. To think he gazed at it for the last time. He had no regrets. He entered the shop. In due time he removed the scrap from the floor and idled near a lathe—the same lathe he had used. Its bearings were shimmed and worn oval. Its gear teeth were chipped, broken and worn smooth. He would never see it again after to-day.

The quitting whistle blew at noon. It was indeed quit for him. He stood in the pay line, received his fourteen dollars, and went to the foreman. He wondered if Jim would be angry? But why should he worry? He would never see Jim again.

"Feeling pretty perk this morning, aren't you, dad?"

The great crisis had arrived.

"I'm quitting to-day, Jim."

"All right, dad."

The old man waited. Perhaps Jim would say something more; but Jim picked up a cake of soap and went to the washroom. Dad remained alone. Was that all they thought of him?

The shop was deserted. He paused at the door for a last look at the machines, one last look at the place he had given his life to. Then he walked out.

Shortly after he called at the bank and made out a withdrawal notice.

"Two one hundred dollar bills?" asked the teller.

The old man nodded. The teller shoved the money through the window. Dad, with trembling fingers, picked it up. He had two hundred dollars. To-morrow was Sunday. He would go out to the home and see Charley Foss and who they paid the money to. He would say nothing to Sarah about it until everything was settled.

At three o'clock he arrived home. Sarah was not there. He went to his room and closed the door. He opened his bank book and withdrew the two yellow bills. He read them, folded them and creased them innumerable times. To think never again would he work. He replaced the bills and washed.

When Sarah came home he was in the kitchen making a fire. Sarah prepared supper and said nothing. After the meal dad sat in his armchair. Sarah did not hurry with the dishes. Her father noticed this. That meant Ed was not coming to-night. Strange! Ed hadn't been around for several nights. Something was wrong. Lately she had talked no more of Ed. Perhaps it was just some lovers' quarrel. Well, Sarah would explain when she was ready. To-morrow the home fund would be paid.

Suddenly Sarah's face turned to the light. It glistened with tears. Her father looked at her helplessly. He could restrain himself no longer.

"Sarah! What is the matter?"

She tried to control her emotion, failed, sobbed, cried—shook her head.

"Sarah, girl!"

Relinquishing her dish rag, she suddenly, convulsively came to her father, knelt on the floor at his feet, leaned on his aged limbs, rested her head in his lap.

"Oh, dad!" she sobbed.

Tenderly he patted her shoulders.

"Oh, dad! Ed won't marry me."

He continued to caress her. She would explain. Just let her go on.

"He—he hasn't got the money," said Sarah.

The old man nodded.

" He's been out of work six weeks, and —and—"

She cried afresh. Her father gently smiled. He understood.

She resumed: " And before we can be married Ed wants to have one hundred and eighty-five dollars."

Dad Snyder ceased nodding. His serenity evaporated.

" Oh, dad, where can I get one hundred and eighty-five dollars?" pleaded Sarah.

The comforting hand dropped. Sarah lifted her head and looked in her father's eyes.

" Do you love him, Sarah?" asked the old man slowly.

" Yes," she answered.

" If Ed loves you, one hundred and eighty-five dollars won't stop your marriage."

" But where can we get it?"

" Is his farm paid for?"

" Yes."

" He can mortgage it."

" I told him that, dad, but he won't do it. He says he doesn't want to start married life in debt."

Vague thoughts formed in the old man's brain.

" He can't get a job, dad, and he owes for his board bill. Even if he did get work now, it would be six months before he could save one hundred and eighty-five dollars."

" But, Sarah, you only marry once; and six months ain't so long."

" Six months!" vociferated Sarah. " Do you realize I'm thirty-four? How do I know Ed will want to marry me in six months? I'm no chicken."

Sarah shook her head hopelessly, rose, left her father and went on with the dishes. Solemnly the old man lit his dilapidated pipe and smoked.

Had Sarah found out that he had two hundred dollars?

Was her story true?

His grizzled face gave no indication of his thoughts.

Should he give the money to Sarah?

" My daughter needs it; I will give it to her," he decided.

His brain recoiled from such renunciation. Trembling, he went to his darkened room and dropped on the bed. An emotional chaos seethed within him. Suddenly he was afraid. Sarah might enter. He closed the door. Then he sat on the bed again.

Confused thoughts fluttered in his brain, like blind bats in a barn seeking to escape. The mist of bewilderment rifted, fogged again, became translucent, clarified. Suddenly he thought more clearly than ever before in his life.

" Here," he considered; " I will keep my money. I have worked years to save it. It is all I have. Would Sarah give me one hundred and eighty-five dollars? Would Ed? No! That settles it. Besides, this is not my problem; it is theirs. It is really none of my business."

His pipe had gone out.

" I am a foolish old man to be bothered. It is settled. I will keep my money."

He got up, lit the light, refilled his pipe and again smoked.

" I will forget it. To-morrow I will pay my money to the home. Then I will be safe from this foolishness."

He puffed his pipe and nodded convincingly. He was satisfied.

He heard a sob. It came from the next room. Sarah was crying. The decision so conclusively arrived at sluiced away before a flood of whispering voices.

" Yes, keep your money, you old miser! That is fine! If Ed doesn't marry Sarah, who will? Nobody. That is none of your concern. That is her fault. What does it matter? You can rest. Rest? Man, there is all eternity to rest in! You lazy scoundrel!"

The whispers swelled to a roar. His soul was torn between these reproofs. The pipe fell from his quivering lips. He wrung his hands. The voices melted away.

He listened. All was still. Sarah had ceased crying. He sighed and sat down again. To-morrow he would go to the home and get this money off his hands. He undressed, extinguished the light and went to bed. The hissing voices soothed. They consoled. He strained his ears to hearken.

" Old man, you are foolish to be both-

ered. Sarah is not old like you. If she and Ed love each other, they will arrange it somehow. Isn't it better that their marriage should be delayed, than you, an old man, should become homeless? If you give this money, they will never know your sacrifice. Be sensible. Rest! You deserve it. Go to sleep."

Gradually he slumbered. How long he knew not. A moaning wind rattled the windows. He opened his eyes. He saw lights, shapes, ghosts, leering devils! He sprang up, despite his age. The voices wailed again. He couldn't stand it.

"Sarah!" he shrieked.

"Dad!" came the answer.

"Sarah! Come here!"

"Dad! Dad!" she called, rushing to his room.

"Sarah, make a light."

She obeyed.

"Dad, what's the matter? Are you all right?"

"Yes, girl."

"For mercy's sake, what's up?"

"Come here. Sit by me."

Again she obeyed. He stroked her arm tenderly.

An expression of contented understanding love illumined the old man's face. His voice was low and calm.

"Sarah, you said you needed one hundred and eighty-five dollars. It is there in my coat pocket."

"Dad! Are you crazy?"

"Look!" insisted the old man, pointing with shaking finger.

She picked up his coat.

"In the inside pocket, Sarah, in that book."

With twitching hands she searched. She produced the book.

"Open it."

Two yellow one hundred dollar bills fluttered out.

"Dad!" she called. "Is it ours?"

"Not ours, Sarah. Yours—yours and Ed's."

She smothered him with hugs, kisses, caresses, but dad seemed gradually to withdraw into his own shell of weary stoicism.

The next day he did not call on Charley Foss, but went around to see Jim, the foreman.

"Sure, take your job back again," said Jim, replying to the old man's plea.

Monday morning Dad Snyder rang in at Mower's again.

Wearily he picked up the waste baskets and shuddered at the smeary cuspidors. Still, this wouldn't last forever, he soliloquized. As soon as Sarah married he would get a room, and save perhaps three dollars a week. A year and a half wouldn't be so long to wait. Then he could go to the home and rest.

"If only I can last," he reflected as he mopped the floor; "if only I can last."

WAITING

THE world stops while I wait for you:
Winds hold their breath, that hurried through
The cañons, and the tallest trees
Cease their low gossiping pleasantries.

The world stops while I wait for you:
The humming bird above the blue
Tall columbine hangs poised and still
The sun stops short against the hill.

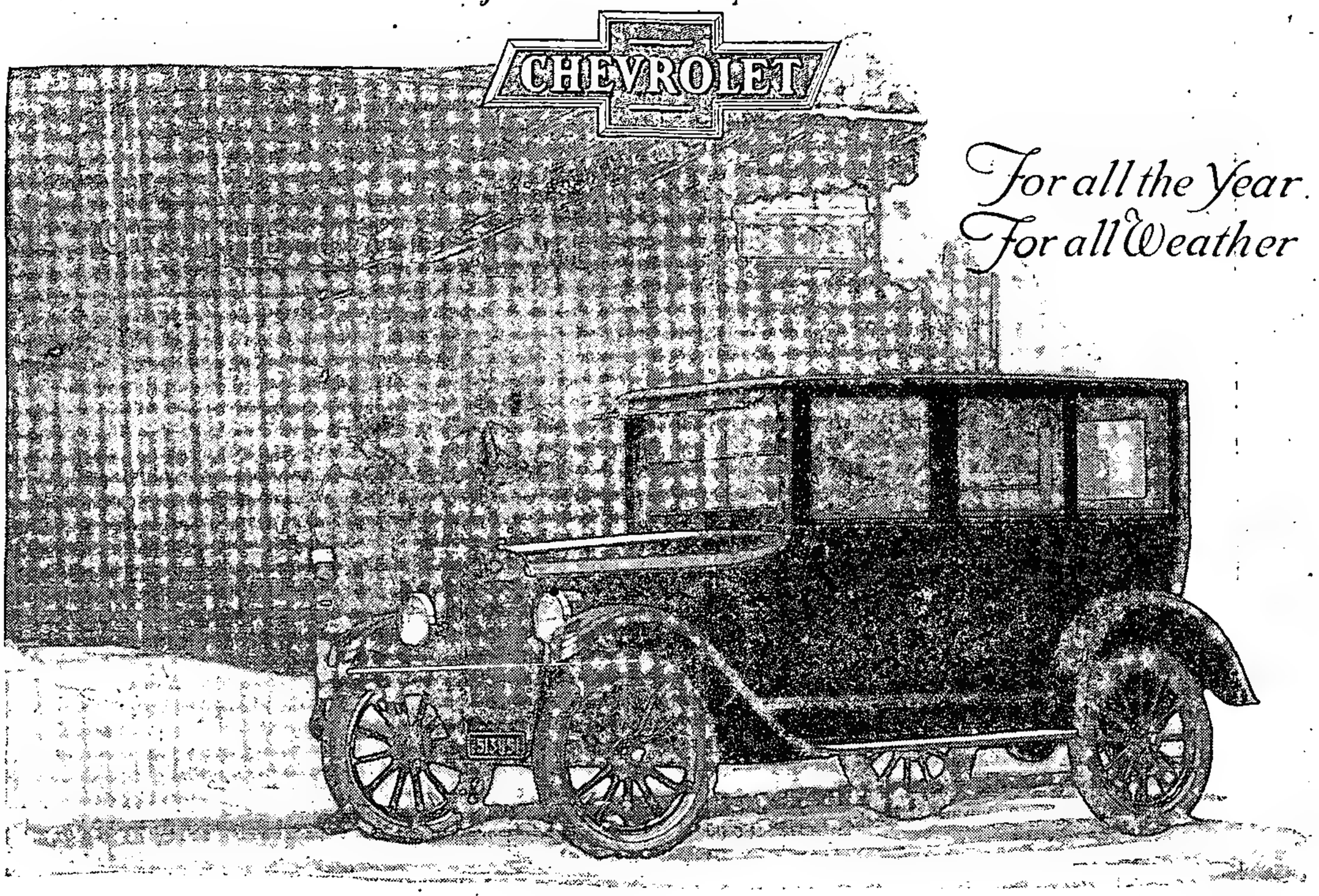
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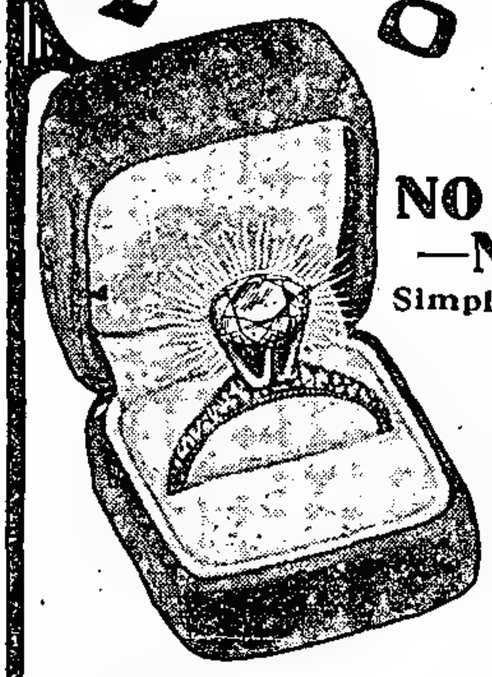
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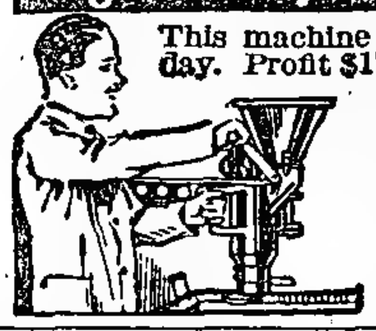
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1 Oblong Pickle Dish (7 1-4 in.)
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1 Salad Dish (8 3-4 in.)
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Guarantee This set consists of 112 pieces of finest quality semi-porcelain, hand fired to rich hard glaze. No toy or useless pieces. Should not be confused with inferior china.

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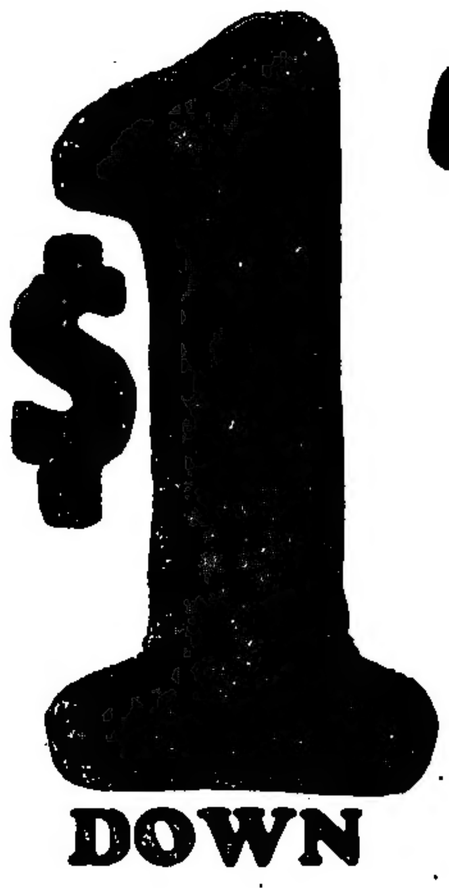
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Buy on our easy payment plan. Thousands of American women find it the means of being always stylishly dressed—and saving money besides. Why don't you open a charge account with us? Let us send you the beautiful silk charmeuse dress on approval. Try it on, see how well it becomes you, and if you are perfectly satisfied pay only $3.20 a month. Send $1.00 with the coupon now!

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